

Beyond the Niche:  
Ecological Cultural Production in the Iberian Peninsula

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY

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OCTOBER 2013



## Acknowledgments

The inspiration of this project comes from many places, people, intuitions and ideas. I would first like to thank my advisers, Ofelia Ferrán and William Viestenz. We have all discovered the richness of these texts together in an irreplaceable experience. I would also like to thank my other committee members: Nicholas Spadaccini, Jaime Hanneken and Christine Marran, whose courses account for the preliminary moments of thinking about ecology and culture.

I also thank the Department of Spanish & Portuguese Studies for continual support and in particular for funding through the Graduate Research Partnership Program in the summer of 2012. This grant gave me the possible to interview numerous poets, artists and engineers discussed in the project. In particular, I should thank Jorge Riechmann, Lluís Sabadell Artiga, Iago Otero Armengol, Perejaume, Joan Nogué and Francesc Serés, who all graciously gave me their time, energy and resources to expand the depth of this project. Additionally, I owe a debt of gratitude to the many friends who generously hosted me and spent time with me.

I thank my colleagues who have enthusiastically encouraged the continuation of this project over the span of my graduate career. In particular, I would like to thank Angela George for suggesting *Nunca Más* as a potential topic of research. I owe a special debt to my colleague and friend Justin Butler in comparative literature. Our conversations have contained seeds of countless inspiration in my current work as well as the work to come.

Finally, I thank my friends and family who have patiently supported this project in countless conversations closely related to its inspiration.

## Dedication

To Jenny, in memoriam



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## **Introduction**

España necesita manifiestos de convivencia y lexemas de simpatía: cultivar la biodiversidad y no la bioperversidad.  
--Manuel Rivas

### Ia. Visibility of the Ecological Crisis in Cultural Production

Longtime climate change skeptic, Richard Muller, appeared on *Democracy Now* in August 2012 and admitted that climate change was real. Muller conceded his position after extensive study of long-term climate analysis. What was most surprising about his comments was not so much his epiphany about the data, but an offhanded remark he made about the evidence: “It’s surprising how little things have changed,” referring to the seemingly marginal increases in temperature that have occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. These changes, though seemingly a trifle, have already begun to cause extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods and droughts in places they otherwise would not have occurred. For Muller, however, the problem is not human economic and social behaviors, but rather the “natural” flux of the world’s climate. It seems to me that what is surprising is not the “few” visible effects of climate change, but rather the large quantities of information and phenomena that remain invisible to our senses, cultural production and political mechanisms. Herein lies the larger problem. How do we, as a species, develop a politics that pays attention to visible and invisible plight of humans and nonhumans, life and nonlife? Throughout this project, I will suggest that changes, though certainly requiring political solutions, also occur in the sphere of cultural production.

There is little question now of the global scale of the current ecological crisis. It is hard to name a part of the world that is not undergoing rapid, if not extreme, changes in

weather patterns. For humans to measure the *scope* of the problems, massive computer systems are needed with real time analysis of atmospheric conditions. The fallout from human economic activity cannot be isolated to one zone as contaminants and toxins quickly spread across oceans and through our food supplies. However, it remains difficult, if not impossible, for the human mind to grasp the vast quantitative scope of these issues. What we experience, in an intimate and confusing sense, are the changes on a local level. Though the dynamism of climactic changes clearly show a correlation, cultural responses to these issues vary immensely, depending on preexisting contact with ecosystems, which, in turn, can be described as eco-cultural systems. The Catalan philosopher Xavier Rubert de Ventós suggests such a notion in his discussion of cultural identity and ecology.

Un sistema no puede crecer y sofisticarse excepcionalmente si no es a expensas de su entorno, de modo que toda *animación* local supone una correlativa *necrosis* ambiental. (32-33)

Ecology, as the study of systems and relations, highlights the hidden connectivity between (human) projects and environmental destruction. Any kind of local construction or development necessarily entails a “correlative” environmental necrosis. This problem is greater still because it is not simply *animación local*, but also *nonlocal* activity from elsewhere that affects local environments, whether they are human, animal or otherwise. It becomes impossible, then, to conceive of cultural identity *senso stricto* as an affirmation of an isolated community. It also becomes difficult to speak about human cultures as entirely human because they are constructed out of, or alongside, other ecosystems. In this sense, we are all a part of what I will describe as eco-cultural systems.

The task of my project, from an ecocritical perspective, is to analyze cultural objects that *imagine* this kind of causality between human *animación* and ecological *necrosis*. Moreover, I am interested in re-imagining particularly Iberian eco-cultural systems as a potential response to help ameliorate this environmental degradation. Some of these responses include new evaluations of the city's relationship to the hinterland, rethinking how we perceive the global and the local as well as laying out the varying relationships between nature and nationalism.

#### Ib. Ecology and Culture in The Iberian Peninsula

The Iberian Peninsula presents an important case study of eco-cultural systems because of the cultural and environmental variations across its terrain. Since the transition to democracy, Spain has proposed a political project that attempts to embrace its own cultural diversity. Indeed, the rights constitutionally granted to autonomous communities were a major milestone of the transition and, as Rosa Montero affirms, a staggering move away from Francoism (Graham 315). The Constitution of 1978 did officially sanction rights and privileges to the historic communities of Spain, including, at first, Catalonia and the Basque Country. While only peripherally involved in these negotiations, Galicia was eventually brought into the fold and granted the status as an autonomous community.<sup>1</sup> On an optimistic note, one should consider this move as a partial recuperation of the Spanish political system before the Franco dictatorship. This has led to a reconsideration and reinvigoration of cultural identities in Spain as a plurinational state. For our purposes, these changes are primarily tied to the identity of minor languages: Catalan, Basque and Galician.

Since the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975 and the establishment of the Constitution of 1978, much has been done to invigorate cultural and literary production in and about Iberian peripheral nationalities. Regional identities have rightly received attention due to their official erasure during Francoism (Graham 336). This attention is constitutional as well as cultural. The Constitution of 6 December 1978 provides an interesting *convivencia* between Article 2's preamble: "the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation" and "the right to autonomy of nationalities and regions of which it is composed" (Graham 333). Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia were eventually granted the status of "historic nationalities," a term that designates a degree of autonomy with respect to a traditionally united community (Balfour 53).

However, as Txextu Aguado points out, the transition to democracy is far from being actualized. Instead, national identities in Spain have been deployed as thin guises for maintaining regional favoritism and, at worst, conservative manifestations of racial and ethnic discrimination. What is needed, Aguado argues, is a different kind of language that views the Spanish nation "como lo compartido en la historia, la lengua y la cultura, moviéndose en las dos direcciones posibles, desde la periferia al centro y viceversa" ("Susó de Toro" 179). "Lo compartido" is about developing a cartography of constellations, sketching out some points of difference and others points of confluence. For such a cultural project to occur, an open and porous form of identity is required.

One way of understanding "lo compartido" is relating the state of minority cultures in Spain to what Galician author Manuel Rivas has described as "the least often read" part of the Constitution, which addresses the environment (*A cuerpo* 272-3).

1. Todos tienen el derecho a disfrutar de un medio ambiente adecuado para el

- desarrollo de la persona, así como el deber de conservarlo.
2. Los poderes públicos velarán por la utilización racional de todos los recursos naturales, con el fin de proteger y mejorar la calidad de la vida y defender y restaurar el medio ambiente, apoyándose en la indispensable solidaridad colectiva.
  3. Para quienes violen lo dispuesto en el apartado anterior, en los términos que la ley fije se establecerán sanciones penales o, en su caso, administrativas, así como la obligación de reparar el daño causado. (*Constitución*)

Article 45 of the Constitution is about co-existence of ecological diversity in the Iberian Peninsula. The text asserts that there is a common environment that is to be protected based on “the indispensable collective solidarity” of the Spanish people. This collectivity is precisely what I gesture at in the title of my project: a collective sense of being and responsibility beyond the narrow niche interests of any one region, based on “lo compartido” of natural and cultural environments. The final point of the text guarantees at least some form of punishment for those who cause harm to the common environment of the country. As we shall see throughout the chapters, the protections issued, though admirable, are consistently ignored, by the perpetrators as well as the government that upholds the Constitution.

Connecting articles 2 and 45 of the Constitution leads to an important theoretical insight concerning the role of nonhumans in the study of human culture. Cary Wolfe points out that theoretical scaffolding of the humanities should be open enough to allow humans to understand our greater ethical responsibility for other beings:

This is simply to say that it will take all hands on deck, I think, to fully comprehend what amounts to a new reality: that the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects (*Animal* 47).

The “new” reality of humanism is one in which nonhumans should be considered very much a part of society and politics. This claim is also about esthetics. Cultural objects, explicitly or implicitly, think about this connection. To push this further, ecocriticism is able to look at a variety of literary, filmic and poetic genres and, given their specific esthetic attributes, develop representations of environment and the beings which inhabit it. This pushes literary analysis further on the question of alterity because it not only questions ethnic and gender lines but those between animal/human and even sentient/nonsentient beings. As this project will demonstrate, it is necessary to decipher multiple different kinds of texts in order to experience different portrayals of where the human is and how this location depends on interconnectedness.

The preceding comments suggest an important implication about the terminology I will use throughout this dissertation. In my view, the term “nonhuman” becomes an important designator because it does not simply imply animals, plants, power plants or oil tankers. Instead, “nonhuman beings” includes any kind of nonhuman sentient or nonsentient being whether it is a natural or artificial thing. In fact, as we shall see, this terminology will help question the differences between the natural and artificial, the human and the animal. Consider the following passage from Bruno Latour’s *Irreductions* (1993):



If you missed the galloping freedom of the zebras in the savannah this morning, then so much the worse for you; the zebras will not be sorry that you were not there, and in any case you would have tamed, killed, photographed, or studied them. Things in themselves lack nothing... (24)

Being-zebra here has nothing to do with it being perceived as such by a human witness and the cameras, firearms, textbooks or traps this witnessing might imply. Indeed, the possible interactions between the zebra and the human make the former thankful for avoiding any encounter. Latour's zebras gesture at the networked relations between objects or the lack thereof within what I have begun describing as eco-cultural systems.

In the larger ecological situation, relationism pushes on catchwords like "interconnectedness" and "coexistence" and asks what these terms really mean. If we take seriously the claim that humans should no longer be the sole focus of cultural production (and I do), Latour's theory sheds light on the prospects of reading and describing ecologically oriented cultural production. An actant is an object viewed in terms of its own agency. In the *Democracy of Objects* (2011), philosopher Levi Bryant explains the concept via Latour: "On the other hand, far from being passive clods awaiting formatting from humans and getting worked over by humans, objects, as theorized by onticology, are themselves, following Latour, actors or actants that are themselves agents" (251). The local becomes a kind of question, open to the forces of various actants around it, inside it and far away from it. Such a theoretical "scaffolding" allows us to survey different models of scale between local culture and global forces.

#### Ic. Experimental Landscapes: Ecotones and the Ecological Avant-garde

As we have begun to see, exchanging bodies of knowledge between ecology and culture is one approach to understanding these new forms of relations in a “shared” reality because it points to interconnection and different kinds of borderlines or areas of shaded transition. Landscape ecology, a subdiscipline developed in the 1970s and 80s, works on a similar level, holistically relating multiple and diverse ecosystems to one another. Its goal is to flesh out how vast webs of interconnection occur (and do not occur) across distinct ecosystems. One way to describe these “points of contact” is through ecotones, transition zones between one system and another. It has been argued, debatably, that these transitional zones are particularly fragile and thus easily susceptible to the effects of climate change (Risser, de Maarel). These transitional areas are thick and ambiguous borders, which allow the reader to explore how different human communities are, in fact, very connected on local and global levels.

The time has come to consider how human culture is simply one part of these layered niches, intricately connected to its surrounding ecosystems. The term ecotone derives from the Greek, *oikos* (as in ecology and economy, meaning house or land) and *tonos* (tension and change). Ecologists use the concept to think about desirable or undesirable points of contact between one ecosystem and another. Instead of laying out thin and rigid lines between one ecological community and another, ecotones admit a certain amount of fluidity in the definition of a border. They are fragile lines that are constantly susceptible to change or complete disappearance. They question the boundaries between one community and another. The term provides an important ecocritical approach to cultural production because it places ecotones within larger

constellations, drawing out tensions and relationships between global and local contexts. To proceed with such an analysis, one must diagnose our current ways of imagining our connection to the world and offer alternative visions of how to proceed. By “alternative” I mean a variety of artistic renderings that begin to look at how entangled we are, as a species, with other beings, to a point to where we desperately need to take ecosystems into account in our political processes as well as in how the local is constituted and affected by global phenomena.

The use of the word “alternative” has a historical precedent in the Iberian avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century. Speaking of the Spanish avant-garde, Germán Gullón offers three concepts that explain some experimental tendencies of the avant-garde in the Peninsula: eccentricity, the rejection of estheticism and the willingness to confront major political and social events, no matter how abstractly (Harris 150-56). Reacting against estheticism, largely seen as a divorce between art and society, as well as the bellicose environment of World War I, the avant-garde movement sought to re-introduce art to the world itself. Placing emphasis on the mediatic mechanisms of film, language and painting, avant-garde artists challenged quotidian perception in favor of surrealism, Dadaism or futurism among other artistic movements. Though these movements are historically specific, their ideas have resonated throughout the twentieth century, giving rise to disparate poetic and visual movements such as the *novísimos* and *posnovísimos* and action art. The goal is not so much to ignore the everyday, but rather to explore its murky depths largely unrealized in conscious meaning. Nonhuman beings, so often the backdrop of human trials, are certainly part of this “murky depth.” While the avant-garde is typically seen as an urban movement, largely uninterested in “natural”

settings, the artistic attention to backdrops is an artistic experiment on rural as well as urban landscapes.

In my view, the avant-garde emphasis on the often invisible or semi-visible relationships between the urban and the rural and the artificial and the natural is one mode of culturally advancing greater ecological awareness. That is to say, ecological avant-garde is about undoing the esthetic categories used to render or represent a certain location. These connections, or the lack thereof, become indispensable for deciphering the viability of an ecological collective. In landscape ecology, the concept of the niche analyzes the conditions that produce and sustain the life of a collectivity. In Latin, *nidus* means nest. In French, the word takes on a second meaning of “to recess” or “to nest” (*nicher*). On the one hand, the term suggests a shallow space carved into a wall for a statue or monument, but more figuratively the term has come mean that one has found a suitable specialization or position in life. In ecology, a niche refers to a role of a specific animal in an ecosystem. The title of my dissertation, referring to each of these discrete meanings, suggests that the focus on one particular niche while ignoring others will fail to account for many of the complexities of the current ecological crisis. The individual body becomes more difficult to isolate, as it is wired into a particular web of relations. The ecological avant-garde can help us understand the relations inside and beyond a particular regional niche.

The human encounter with the natural world is often rendered as a landscape painting. Hypothetically, the visual medium exalts the natural world and praises its external beauty. In English, the etymology of the word landscape refers to land with a specific character or mood. This character, while often attributed to the terrain, has more

to do with human contact and affect than the land itself. In Spanish, this human affect is more overt. The 1832 edition of *Diccionario de la lengua española del Real Academia Española* gives one definition to *paisaje* “un pedazo de país en la pintura.” Landscapes occur on a more limited scope, quantifiable and therefore incorporated as the backdrop for the national or the civilized.

Joan Nogué, a Catalan geographer based in Girona (Catalonia) has questioned this traditional definition of landscape throughout his work. One facet of his work looks at what he describes as a “phenomenological geography” examining “the nature of environmental experience and behavior” (Seamon 159). His early work sought to bridge geography with a humanist phenomenology, utilizing the concept of landscape as a basic unit of our experience in the world.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Nogué traces this experience through the dynamic changes occurring throughout Spain in relation to constant facelifts of urbanization—inside and outside of cities. Citing philosopher Paul Virilio, Nogué describes this process as “la dramaturgia del paisaje:” the tension between constant alterability of landscape and the “rootedness” of human communities in a given terrain (267). In his essay “Paisaje y comunicación,” Nogué offers further nuance to this position on the relationship between the imagined terrain and the real terrain:

El paisaje es, en buena medida, una construcción social y cultural, siempre anclada—eso sí—en un substrato material, físico. No es una entelequia mental. El paisaje es, *a la vez*, una realidad física y la representación que culturalmente nos hacemos de ella; la fisonomía externa y visible de una determinada porción de la superficie terrestre y la percepción individual y social que genera; un tangible

geográfico y su interpretación intangible. Es, *a la vez*, el significante y el significado, el continente y el contenido, la realidad y la ficción. (30)

Nogué begins from what seems to be a dualism of the real elements (*lo significado, la realidad*, etc.) and the imagined elements (*significante, ficción, lo social*, etc.). However, if considered in terms of the above-mentioned zebras, what Nogué sketches out is simply a list of different modes of experiencing the same terrain—whether experienced by humans, zebras or bulls. Instead of drawing out a contrast between “natural” ecologies and human ecologies, Nogué locates them in a common shared space, that is, in a common eco-cultural system. This elaboration of landscape as a *simultaneously* real and esthetic reality argues for a greater connection between the terrain itself and the culture that inhabits it.

However, many artists and theorists now consider the landscape genre to be out of touch with the very terrain it claims to worship. Painting a landscape remains reified from a *human* view of an environment, discouraging further inquiry into the actual ecological mechanisms of the terrain itself. Indeed, these images, derived from our gaze, are more about human affect than land. Furthermore, the artistic medium exhibits a profound problem of scale: how it is we *frame* a given space. The physical frame around a landscape painting disallows the inclusion of other interlocked geographical areas. This is also true of our faculty of vision, which always offers a limited representation of a terrain. These problems are not simply esthetic. Landscape painting has been used as a lens to understand how human communities generally understand their environment.

Experimental landscapes, a term I use to describe ecological avant-garde cultural production, can help us imagine and visualize this interplay at work because they express

different senses of environment. Reading into these reformulations is to read for environmentality: how everyday experience and art objects generate distinct, yet interrelated, perceptions of how “natural” and “artificial” environments *appear* to us, and, most importantly, how these appearances might be challenged or considered differently. Catalan artist Perejaume, a focal point of chapter two, has become wary of the term landscape because it has become too polyvalent, to the point that it can mean almost anything. His concern is that landscape has become divorced from the thing itself (i.e. the land) and simply alludes to political and cultural histories and fantasies attached to the land:

Above all landscape, as a word and material, has become, in the long run, ever more masticatingly confusing, bound up with human, inhuman, and superhuman things, optically muddled, both logically and imponderable elements, susceptible, all things considered, to letting itself become mixed up even more; so much so that it begins to seem to us to be a field interlaced with action, observation and of barely practical diction, absolutely slobbered, anthropophagous, antisyntactic, a complete landslide. (Resina, *New Ruralism* 188-89)

As his rich language indicates, Perejaume criticizes landscape painting and the place of landscape in culture. “Semantically,” materials have become mixed up and lost meaning. But I wager that within his critique of the genre is also what makes them analytically and ecologically important. Namely, landscapes are concrete composites or compositions of heterogeneous materials, ranging from human affect to ancient layers of sediment and glaciers to mining equipment and tourist ski resorts. In other words, landscapes are a mediating point between a variety of conflicting discourses about humans and their

environment. They are, in this sense, iterations of ecotones, woven together from different narrative traditions, water supplies and mountain chains. Analytically untangling these meeting points leads to new dissections of how human communities interact with particular environments.

This becomes more evident with a focus on many contemporary urban living situations, which currently prohibit many points of contact between the natural world and human economies. That is to say, city living represents a split within human ecology. What is dangerous about this phenomenon is that, though globalized cities feel more interconnected than ever, there remains a fundamental lack of awareness (and consequential action) about environmental issues. Moreover, academic analysis, from sociology to literary studies, almost entirely champions the urban as the site of progressive action, discarding rural living as backwards, retrograde and conservative. How can experimental landscapes question and, in a certain sense, move away from this dangerous alienation between human and nonhuman? Joan Ramón Resina has recently argued that a new ruralism is a means to critique the cultural hegemony of the city, as encapsulated in the academic trend to almost entirely favor urban culture. In my view, experimental landscapes question the divisions between art and life, what belongs inside the artwork and what lies outside it (Ibid 25). In part, these works give pause to the inner workings of the traditional landscape and ask us to pay attention to how they are composed, expanding or contracting the typical spatial components of a humanized horizon. They want to draw us into a space, not as spectators, but as active participants with the eco-cultural systems that we typically describe as landscapes.



In place of the word landscape, Perejaume contends that analysis should simply refer to the phenomenon as “that” (Ibid 187-89). Experimental landscapes self-reflexively critique the genre through what I describe as a new ecological avant-garde. They work to expand beyond the human gaze and include other alien and nonhuman voices or viewpoints present in local environments. They also open up the question of scale in a temporal sense (to look at changes and degradations over time) as well as spatially (to connect one locale with larger global frameworks). I am interested in artistic experimentation that not only critiques the chaotic state of landscapes, but that also offers new composites or arrangements of objects that help us respond to a variety of ecological issues

Id. The Antipodes of the Local and the Global

Though it is possible to explore environmentalist debates through many different lenses, I find it useful to consider a fundamental rift between the local and the global in order to contemplate how eco-cultural systems are understood.<sup>3</sup> Traditional environmental perspectives ground human ecology within the confines of a local environment, an approach that loosely fits under the term localism, what I will roughly define here as reactive, fragmented forces of resistance to globalization for economic, political, cultural or religious reasons. To offer a specific environmental definition of the term, I turn to the concept of “bioregionalism,” which argues that a particular sense of place or location is the best point of departure to argue for a new form of environmental politics. In the recent collection *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology and Place* (2012), the editors offer Robert Thayer’s definition as a point of departure for the collection:

A *bioregion* is literally and etymologically a “life-place”—a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human communities. Bioregions can be variously defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems, and related identifiable landforms (e.g., particular mountain ranges, prairies or coastal zones) and by the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region. Most importantly, the bioregion is emerging as the most logical locus and scale for a sustainable, regenerative community to take root and to *take place*. (Qtd. in Lynch 3)

Notable here is the attempt to do away with political borders in favor of “natural boundaries,” predicated on shared commonalities and resources in a given environment. While traditional political lines are supposedly thin and rigid, natural lines of division are thick and ambiguous. These limits also overlap and mutate to the point that it is often difficult to distinguish one from another. For the proponents of bioregionalism, the term offers an alternative to traditional environmental activism (Ibid). Instead of simply asserting a rhetoric decrying current policy, bioregionalism offers positive steps toward a different kind of economic system, based on *our* sense of place.

The emphasized first-person plural pronoun “our,” however, underscores a major problem in this viewpoint: its emphasis on a purely human point of view. For Thayer, a bioregional territory is somehow “unique” and set apart from the rest of the world. Despite its emphasis on “natural” boundaries, it also returns quickly to the domesticating powers of human vision. Its precepts should be kept in mind because it encourages re-

thinking of current capitalist economic and ideological models that we roughly consider to be economic globalization. However, this viewpoint becomes problematic when it is used to seal off a region from the outside.<sup>4</sup> The eco-cultural system it prescribes is too limited in its scale. What is needed instead is an “open” kind of localism, or, in other words, a localism that takes into account global climate phenomena and cultural diversity. What this means for bioregionalism is that the time and spatial scales put to work here do not think big enough or small enough, fast enough or slow enough to account for the complex changes between one location and another.

Bioregionalism, however, is an important perspective to consider because it does turn our view towards intimate, daily interactions between humans and nonhumans. And, in fact, I do think there are aspects of bioregionalism that should be salvaged, albeit through a consideration of *multiple* regions, such as those of Iberia, constructed as constellations of interwoven eco-cultural systems, certainly colliding in moments of contact, but also maintaining their differences and idiosyncrasies. Such a geographical openness yields a local viewpoint that remains in touch with its responsibilities to its neighbors next door as well as across the globe.

This responsibility is about understanding how the decisions and policies of particular communities affect larger eco-cultural systems. A second ecological perspective urges us to think globally, arguing that it is impossible to grasp the extent and depth of environmental problems within a particular bioregional framework. In part, with its resort to “natural” boundaries, bioregionalism really begs the question of how one can really demarcate and limit the “end” of one ecosystem and the beginning of another. This is Ursula Heise’s critique in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* (2008), in which she argues

that localism (i.e. bioregionalism) does not think on scales large enough to solve the truly global scope of the ecological crisis facing today's world. Timothy Morton makes a similar point in *The Ecological Thought* (2010): "[T]he best environmental thinking is thinking big—as big as possible, and maybe even bigger than that, bigger than we can conceive" (20). At base, I also think that localism ultimately fails in terms of its scope and scale because there is a problem with its concept of space. That is to say, a system of thinking ecologically based solely on "our unique sense of place" cannot account for the above-mentioned "constellation of interwoven systems." In *For Space* (2005), Doreen Massey offers a similar critique of place:

And then there is "place." In the context of a world which is, indeed, increasingly interconnected the notion of place (usually evoked as "local place") has come to have totemic resonance. Its symbolic value is endlessly mobilized in political argument. For some it is the sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold on to as "the global" spins its ever more powerful and alienating webs. For others, a "retreat to place" represents a protective pulling-up of drawbridges and a building of walls against the new invasions. Place, on this reading, is the locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference. (6)

Massey introduces two valences that characterize some common reactions to globalization. On the one hand, "place" forecloses on paying closer attention to what is not present at hand outside of the bioregional nexus. Instead, bioregionalism would have us remain isolated within our unique sense of place. It turns out, I believe, that we need a

different sense of environment that considers what the invisible, the absent, and the nonlocal suggest about what is beyond of our normal scales of experience.

In my view, the two categories of the local and the global are not mutually exclusive, but rather overlap in conceptually challenging ways. This is a question of scale: how we measure what is significant or insignificant in an environment. In his lecture at the French Institute in London, Bruno Latour argues that both categories are ultimately models of scale:

Even farmers depend on the special knowledge of agronomists, soil scientists and others. And this is even truer of the global climate: the globe by definition is not global but is, quite literally, a *scale model* that is connected through reliably safe networks to stations where data points are collected and sent back to the modelers.

(5)

Following Latour, all explorations and representations of the global are simply *renderings* and representations of something much larger and ultimately evasive to human experience. Models of global phenomena are, it turns out, a means to channel the global on a local scale, made visible and conceivable to human minds and senses. As the word “renderings” suggests, perceiving different scale models is about representation and, therefore, will shortly bring us to a set of questions that humanists should consider.

The question of how different scales alter our perception of climate change and other ecological challenges also underscores the importance of analyzing different artistic mediums. Disciplines and traditions across cultural production largely saturate the languages, whether visual, spoken or textual, used to convey a sense of environmentality. In this project, I survey a variety of cultural objects such as poetry, art installation pieces,

action art, painting, novels and film. These implicit comparisons draw out the shared tropes and problems inherent in capturing the environment within a cultural object.

This project lays out a series of commonly shared *global* problems while also surveying particular responses and difficulties in Spain. While Spain certainly shares in the global problems such as a threatened biodiversity and pollution, there is also a remarkable amount of awareness of these issues that reflects particular cultural proclivities. The connected issues of nationalism, nature, the urban/rural divide and global and local scales will re-appear in the particular contexts of each chapter. Studying this ecological ambivalence (between the global and the local) within Iberian culture provides important insights into how localist frameworks overlap and differ with globalizing structures. Due to its longstanding regional variation and so-called *convivencia*, or co-existence of different cultures and, indeed, ecosystems, Iberia becomes an ecological space that is not simply composed of individuated niches, but rather operates as an eco-cultural situation beyond any singular local context.<sup>5</sup> By connecting the dots between different locations throughout the Iberian Peninsula this project begins to sketch out aspects of this situation, which I characterize through the five chapter titles, Extension, Experiment, Depth, Disappearance and Reappearance.

Chapter one begins discussing a major move in twentieth-century philosophy against the traditional concept of extension is to argue that a body is porous and open in a state of fragility—ultimately dependent upon its relations to outside environments.<sup>6</sup> This assertion also coincides with one presupposition of ecology: that an environment molds what we consider as an individual body. In this chapter, extension also becomes a way to consider the connections between politics and nature. I develop a second notion of poetic

extension in order to think about the work of Jorge Riechmann, a poet, Marxist philosopher and ecologist, who works through a kind of *Poesía de diferencia* in order to consider how literature investigates the relationships between human and nonhuman communities. Working between ethics, poetry and politics, Riechmann is committed to raising awareness about environmental issues on a national and global scale through what he describes as eco-socialism. His poetry offers a fierce commitment to public discourse through pedagogy, digital publishing and other means.

Mixing together local, national and global scales, Riechmann challenges what we consider to be the limits or horizons of our landscapes. His experimental landscapes push the esthetic and the poetic as possible catalysts for extending politics to nonhuman beings. Indeed, as we shall see, many of his poems speculate on how a variety of ecosystems are connected. While this chapter does not directly relate to the overarching subject of regional identities, it does question the use of “nature” in social, political and esthetic discourses as well as a critique of the city. In place of current urban designs, Riechmann’s eco-socialist essays offer “la ciudad-bosque” as an alternative space, composed of both urban and rural, human and nonhuman elements. *La ciudad-bosque*, then, becomes a helpful tool for our later considerations within particular regional contexts.

Chapter two offers a discussion of visual landscape representations as a means to further critique the category of landscape and sketch out the esthetics of experimental landscapes. I begin with a case study of *L’Observatori del Paisatge* in Olot, Catalonia. The Catalan government created the Landscape Observatory as a means to implement the European Landscape Convention, created by the Council of Europe in 2004. While I

applaud the proposals in the Convention, I also see them as out of touch with the status of many terrains due to industrial and sociological developments of globalization. Indeed, some of this “protectionism” falls under the category of what I described above as bioregionalism: an effort to protect certain landscapes at the expense of others. The Observatory’s Director Joan Nogué discusses the triad of nature-culture-region, what he describes as the traditional method of defining the characteristics of a landscape. For Nogué, this triad no longer explains the state of many landscapes in the era of globalization because its scale remains too isolated within one location. Instead, Nogué argues that we should begin to imagine different ways of representing the problematic sprawls, urban wastelands and abandoned farmlands through different artistic and scientific approaches.

In place of the nature-culture-region triad, I move to Catalan artist Lluís Sabadell Artiga’s “Manifest contra el paisatge.” I consider how his manifesto against landscape painting appears in his installation work, particularly “El paisaje no existe” from 2010. Sabadell Artiga worries that landscape painting is an art form that remains entirely unengaged with questions of ecology and environmental sustainability. Sabadell Artiga’s work is a critique of more traditional notions of landscape, specifically indicating their status as an esthetic category rather than a designation of ontology. Instead, landscape reifies nature into an esthetic value, a monolith to be esthetically admired. Beyond this pleasure, landscape does nothing to extend art (and ourselves) into the pressing ecological questions of our era. Sabadell here seems to directly criticize a perspective present in the European Convention of Landscape: “Aparentemente el paisajista ama la naturaleza, pero lo que en realidad ama es el reflejo de si mismo en la naturaleza; lo que



se ama no es la experiencia de la naturaleza” (“Manifest”). For Sabadell, this picture is unsustainably packaged, bought and sold. Landscape painting seals off a horizon, giving us an impression that we are immersed in some sacred, virgin territory, when in fact there is a waste processing plant two miles down the road. Landscapes appear to humans on the cusp of proto-forms of capitalist systems, reifying Nature as a sacred territory, ultimately harmed by humans. Thus Nature worship turns out to be a symptom of our instrumentalization of Nature, insofar as it is a collection of static resources, awaiting our arrival.

I continue this discussion with an analysis of Perejaume’s *Tres dibujos de Madrid: una acción con Perejaume* (2007). This text documents Perejaume’s “acción” to try to navigate out of Madrid on foot from the Facultad de Bellas Artes, a task so difficult that the team needed an architect to help configure a way out. Perejaume and a group of five professors also set out with three different paintings from the eighteenth century. His point was to actualize these historical images with the reality of Madrid’s urban sprawl today, to “give them feet,” as it were. *Acción*, for Perejaume, is not simply an act, but an event that draws us into its relationship with the world. It requires that we question our involvement, or lack thereof, with our natural and artificial surroundings. It is an extension of art into human thinking and into the world. In my view, I see the *acción* as a different approach to landscape because it does not leave the viewer on the outside of the situation but invites him to be a part of the work. Landscape is here an active category of experience, an open question, precisely what I define as experimental landscapes.

Experimental landscapes need to show esthetically how nonhumans are a part of human identity and, from there, why interconnections in a constellation of open localisms show how a new Iberian *convivencia* should work.

Chapter three looks at the role of landscape in the imaginary of Basque nationalism. I consider Basque painter Vicente Ameztoy's *Karne y klorofila* as a sinister form of ruralism, which not only critiques the xenophobic, racial overtones of Basque nationalism, but also draws the reader into new forms of rural thinking, between human and animal, human and nonhuman. Comparing his work to the Belgian surrealist René Magritte, I ask: how does this kind of landscape painting reformulate Basque nationalism? How does Ameztoy open up the category of Basque identity in the late twentieth century?

In *Karne y klorofila*, Vicente Molina Foix introduces Ameztoy's major body of work, arguing that analysis of his landscape art is not easy because there are no facile answers. Foix cites Nietzsche's term *Unzeitgemäss* (untimeliness) to characterize Ameztoy (11). The word, it seems, signals discomfort, enthusiasm and lamentation all at once. For Foix, this takes us close to the telluric encounter between the naturalist (Ameztoy and ourselves, the viewers) and the rural environment. While Ameztoy's work utilizes the imagery of traditional rural Basque, he also obscures the role of the backdrop and foreground of each image. Painters, human subjects and technology alike are all entangled with the environmentality of the background. In these paintings, Basque identity loses its stable ontological footing to become an open question mark, speculating about our interconnectedness to animals, vegetables, rocks and trees.

This encounter between human and nonhuman is similar to what Bernardo Atxaga refers to in his discussion of a “sinister” ruralism: “Nadie se atreverá a negarlo: los lugares son mucho más de lo que parecen” (“El mundo” 1). The sinister depth of the rural challenges the typical esthetic of landscape painting and the category of ruralism itself. Foix describes this process as a reversal of what Mondrian lays out in his *Natural Reality and Artificial Reality*: instead of moving from consciousness of material things to a consciousness of spirit, Amezttoy moves the other way around. These paintings impart spirit (embodied in the solitary landscape painting) to the play of material things (including humans). This affirms how the art historian Ana María Guasch describes Amezttoy’s work: as a “desdoblamiento, es decir, una tela que surge y es continuación de un paisaje supuestamente real, que, a su vez, es virtual...” (277).

I argue that Amezttoy’s “depth,” then, operates on two epistemological levels. First, it aims to hollow out the mystical ontology often associated with Sabino Arana’s vision of Basque nationalism, which often suggests a rootedness of the Basque people with their environment. In Amezttoy’s work, this imaginary seems to rot from the inside out like a bad apple. In these challenging experimental landscapes, the exclusionary principles of Basque nationalism become unreal and untenable. In addition to this critique, Amezttoy also introduces an esthetics of alternative ecological history, including flora and fauna that remain outside of Arana’s nationalism. There are paintings, for instance, that capture *Insignis* pines and eucalyptus burned by nationalists because they were associated with industrialization. In the end, Amezttoy demolishes the ground of Arana’s vision and offers new views of mutation, variation and openness.

Focusing on the Catalan author Francesc Serés, chapter four reflects on how novels deal with the disappearance of townships across Spain.<sup>7</sup> These disappearances are due to major shifts in demographics in the second half of the twentieth century as well as state-sanctioned projects of development, most specifically hydroelectric dams. In the 1970s, several North American and English anthropologists studied how these social and material changes affected actual states of living. Most notably, Joseph Aceves and William Douglass published *The Changing Faces of Rural Spain*, which surveys multiple geographical areas.

Serés contributes to these anthropological studies through his trilogy *De estiércol y de mármoles* (2003), which in is, in large part, a study of ruins. Surveying the remainder of townscapes and landscapes, Serés speculates on the prospects of reviving a rural world that has since disappeared. His work not only returns to decimated rural landscapes after they have changed, mutated or decayed but also contextualizes them with respect to the urban. This connectivity places ruralism squarely within a current ecological framework because it refuses to consider it as a completely isolated world, apart from larger political and cultural questions. Thus it becomes *impossible* to consider the imaginary of the rural as simply defunct and decrepit without considering the larger forces at work.

Connecting Serés to what I see as a larger literary trend in Spain, I conceive of his literary “restoration” as a search for a rural Atlantis. Just as Antonio Benítez Rojo considers the use of the Atlantis myth in a Caribbean context, I speculate on the rural as a disappeared world that can only be pieced together through exploration of objects that, like Heidegger’s tools, often resist our contemplation or use. In Serés’s first novel, the

result is a prose of photographic fragmentation, in which we read bits and pieces of a larger, invisible or semi-visible narrative of floods and droughts.

Finally, chapter five looks at the *Nunca Máis* movement after the *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Galicia in 2002. Its goal is to examine the extent to which this crisis spurred ecological awareness in Iberia (inside and outside of Galicia). I will examine the political impact of the movement itself and two literary interpretations of the event (one could theorize about the *event* here). Both Manuel Rivas and Suso de Toro encourage not only a thorough investigation into the “facts” of the incident but also take an ironic posture towards the official claims about the accident and its fallout. The literary investigation connects back to the “dark side of objects” discussed in chapter one because it poetically attributes a kind of agency to the ship, oil and the sea itself, each begin to silently mutate as major players in the unfolding of an ecological crisis. I connect the *Nunca Máis* movement to the overarching theme of ecology in Rivas’s work, found specifically in his essays and poetry. I examine his collection of poetry, *A desaparición da neve* (2009) because it directly links Spain’s multinational culture to the question of climate change. Rivas offers translations of his poetry in Basque, Catalan and Castilian alongside the Galician originals. Poetry, in Rivas, becomes a question of interrelatedness between multiple cultural identities. His journalism and essays, collected in *A cuerpo aberto* (2008), complement this poetics through a general discussion of major political issues in Spain as well as environmental issues. In an analysis of his 2009 acceptance speech into the *Real Academia Galega*, “A boca da literatura: memoria, ecoloxía, lingua,” Rivas fleshes out his view that cultural heritage is connected to the stakes of future environmental sustainability and conservation.

My dissertation approaches Iberian regional and national identities from this ecological position, surveying the participation of nonhuman entities in Iberian cultural production: Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia. This analysis drives regional nationalities away from the isolated, enclosed niche and into a framework with other global organizations and politics precisely because thinking ecologically is about contact with other beings and communities. Ecological thinking in Spain is in line with this kind of work because it examines the intimacy between humans and nonhumans, localities and nonlocalities.

## **Chapter 1: Extension**

The essential game between settlement and the world, between the feet and the eyes,  
between subject and extension, is what creates tension in landscapes.  
-Perejaume,

### **1a. Philosophical Extension & Poetic Extension**

The philosophical precept of extension represents what sociologist Bruno Latour considers to be the major deficiency of modernity: the rigid divide between matter and mind, or between human civilization (*polis*) and nature (*natura*) (*The Politics*).<sup>8</sup> Nature, as the generative font of matter, need not be considered politically because it is simply a matrix of resources at the disposal of the human polis. On this view, matter's political fate is wholly contingent on human interest in its survival or demise. Extension is also a word embedded deep within the framework of modern philosophy. Since Descartes, it has denoted a means of "taking up space." For the French philosopher, extension remains purely physical, an essence of corporeal bodies that cannot express psychical activities (36-37). Spinoza draws out this distinction arguing that a substance must be infinite in its attribute. For Spinoza, extension and cognition are ultimately modes of one substance, God (34-7). Since Kant, extension seems to conceptually disappear, as he makes no major reference to his precursors' hypothesis. However, the distinction it represents, between mind and body, persisted in his work and continues to be a problem for contemporary philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Kant pushes the divide even further, to contend that the human subject has no access to the things themselves (*noumena*). Materials are only available to us as they appear to consciousness (*phenomena*) (162-67).

This epistemological distance between nature and politics, between human thinking and brute matter, also has geological implications. Recently, the scientific community has widely accepted the hypothesis that we are currently living in the age of the Anthropocene, a geological era dominated by human labor.<sup>10</sup> Yet many of these effects remain invisible in political discourse because of the rigid divide between ecosystems and human communities. For Latour, the modern division between nature and culture has led us towards a concept of “*res extensa-cogitans*,” a form of extension always predicated on cognition (“Where is *Res Extensa*?”).<sup>11</sup> Extension is more about mind than it is about bodies. Extension remains “brute matter” appearing ready-to-hand before the human mind.<sup>12</sup> In terms of the modern nature-culture divide, the problem is that extension theoretically represents our own prohibition against analysis outside of activity of the human mind, that is, of environments churning around us. This phrase, “reality is churning,” is a reference to Graham Harman and is meant to conjure up a concept we will later describe as the meanwhile:

But beneath this ceaseless argument, reality is churning. Even as the philosophy of language and its supposedly reactionary opponents both declare victory, the arena of the world is packed with diverse objects, their forces unleashed and mostly unloved. Red billiard ball smacks green billiard ball. Snowflakes glitter in the light that cruelly annihilates them, while damaged submarines rust along the ocean floor. (*Towards Speculative Realism* 94)

Why, then, raise the question of extension again if it should remain properly buried in the invisible realm of Kantian noumena? I believe that the concept takes on new meaning when viewed through the confluence of ecology and culture because cultural objects can



explore ways in which political rights might extend to nonhuman beings. Extension, in this second interdisciplinary register, is not simply about brute matter, but rather about the extent to which artistic mediums critique and raise questions about our relationship to the natural world: the degree to which human labor and machines affect ecosystems proximal or distant from sites of capitalist production. Extension calls attention to the limited resources of the planet and our place within these larger systems.

In this chapter, I push the term extension in this aspect of ecological connection, to explore how art expands or contracts our awareness of what surrounds us. In other words, I put to work extension to examine how art examines this mesh of life and nonlife. The mesh is Timothy Morton's term from *The Ecological Thought* (2010).

"Mesh" can mean the holes in a network and threading between them. It suggests both hardness and delicacy.... By extension, "mesh" can mean "a complex situation or series of events in which a person is entangled; a concatenation of constraining or restricting forces or circumstances; a snare" (28).

I use the term to refer precisely to this interconnection or "entanglement" between human and nonhuman, between life and nonlife. Extension helps us imagine what it is we already know: the wellbeing or demise of our nonhuman counterparts help compose our human communities. Generally speaking, art investigates the supposed boundary lines between human and nonhuman in order to unravel and critique our usual ways of seeing horizons and landscapes. When considering art, we begin to imagine what normally remains invisible and unreconciled in our view of the world. I call this kind of art "experimental landscapes:" a poetics that defies the scopes of both the local and the global through affect. In this chapter, I use the work of Jorge Riechmann, Spanish poet,

philosopher and ecologist, to extrapolate theoretically and ecologically how experimental landscapes work. While I do enter into some socio-political discussion in relation to the texts analyzed, the intention of this first chapter is one of theoretical formulation, which will shed new conceptual light on the particularities of ecological thought in the Iberian peninsula, analyzed socio-historically in the chapters that follow. Indeed, Riechmann highlights how Iberia is a productive nexus for understanding the global forces at work in climate change. I examine Riechmann's poetry in relation to his essays on political economy and ecology. These discussions lead to an elucidation of the ecological "meanwhile" as well as practical proposals on how to transform contemporary living via an ecosocialist framework. In turn this poetics and praxis will lead to future revisions of the divide between human societies and nature and, as we shall see, between the urban and the rural.

#### 1b. The Ecology of the Limit

Riechmann identifies the central concern of ecology as the limit (*Gente* 37). What is a sustainable economy, he asks, if not an approach to live within the limits of the biosphere? Despite current policies, Riechmann asks if so-called sustainable development suggest anything besides the creation of economies sensitive to the finite lives of natural resources? Limits underscore the plight of a finite world submitted to a theoretically infinite capitalist expansion. The problem is that current modes of capitalist consumption think about expansion and growth without limits or, in other words, without serious consideration of the ecological fallout done in the name of human advancement (*El socialismo* 48-49). This is, according to some ecological perspectives, precisely why capitalism has so much resistance against more "sustainable" living (O'Connor 234-42).

Riechmann is committed to the idea that capitalist production is in fact the largest destructive force of our time. Critic Pedro Provencio summarizes this position in his introduction to Riechmann's *Futuralgia: poesía reunida* (2011):

La abundancia con que somos agraciados en algunos rincones del planeta se apoya en la sobreexplotación acelerada de los recursos naturales, y ya contamos con previsiones muy aproximadas de cómo y cuándo puede producirse el colapso ecológico humano. (13)

According to Provencio, the abundance of commodities covers over the dark reality that capitalism has sped up an “overexploitation” of the world’s resources, to the point of imminent environmental crisis. The trouble with a capitalist economic model is that it fails to account for the real and impassable limits of the biosphere. Riechmann asserts that we have created “una lamentable economía de la expansión material continua” based on the “desire” for “immediate satisfaction” (*El socialismo* 58).

How can poetry put into contact this contradiction between ecological finitude and economic infinity? Riechmann’s essays and poems fuse *multiple* “corners of the planet” into a shared and open space. This alternative global space is one of diagnosis (the dangers of our current version of globalization) as well as of prognosis (the prospects of recovering from the current risks). Thus this shared place of the poem textually demarcates common concerns from Spain to around the globe.

In Riechmann’s work, Spain becomes an iteration of the local intimately wed to global phenomena. In the Introduction, I argued that the antipodes the local and the global are both constructed models for understanding shared problems and, in this sense, both scales remain necessary to grasp the enormity and the particularity of environmental

changes and crises. Riechmann frames local environmental problems through the global crisis of our current economic and political systems. He considers these very questions on theoretical and practical levels, arguing that what is needed is “combate cultural” in order to speculate on the current limits of our own human situation (*Gente* 219). “Combate cultural” is a poetic intervention or action that questions our daily experience of the space around us and urges for a change of value systems. Cultural and physical landscapes do not remain isolated to local experiences, but rather become experimentally combined to encourage different images of the ecological crisis. Riechmann’s poetry consistently places global phenomena on a local scale for his readers to viscerally experience their effects.

Combate cultural is a poetic act that helps cut through the façade projected by capitalism. But what exactly is this façade? For Riechmann, consumer-centered capitalism, as Francis Fukuyama’s famous “end of history” is a “truncated and mutilated version of utopia” with millions left without access to basic food and healthcare and others greatly rewarded for implementing this unequal system (*El socialismo* 45). Technological innovation, entertainment centers and shopping malls all appear to offer unlimited options on material goods, but they in fact foreclose on the possibility of diagnosing the above-mentioned ecological and social problems found in growth model economies (46). In *Gente que no quiere ir a Marte* (2004), capitalist expansion is characterized as “fáustico, prometeico o luciferino” because of its domination and re-modeling of nature (36). This “pride” of ignoring ecological limits in the name of a “truncated utopia” is an example of what Riechmann calls “movimientos de fuga” (movements of escape or “of a fugue”). Indeed, these are not the acts of *anthropos* but of

*antropófugos* (35-37). Riechmann's neologism is a play on the words *antropófago* (cannibal) and *fuga* (escape). Riechmann's call, one that I want to echo throughout this work, is that humanity need not take flight into technological, economic or philosophical fantasies. The problem is much more internal and close at hand. *Combate cultural* aims to reorient humanity towards the biosphere. One approach extends poetic affect to the cracks of the world in order to, as Jo Labanyi recently put it, consider emotions "not as properties of the self, but as produced through the interaction between self and world" (223).

1c. Self-reflexivity and *el realismo del desconsuelo*

Riechmann's phrase *combate cultural* offers other options that are more in tune with the scale of a finite planet (as we shall see later, these options stem from his political position: ecosocialism). Taken at point blank, *combate* brings to mind a kind of *poesía comprometida*, in which art serves purely as a propaganda machine for a given ideological position.<sup>13</sup> In Riechmann's case, this is far from the truth. Poetry (and cultural production writ large) is a possible means of creative resistance to this mutilated utopia. As we shall see, "free time" (*tiempo libre*) must become liberated time (*tiempo liberado*) (*Gente* 220). In my view, this resistance does not mean that it simply gathers force against predominant western lifestyles, dominated by global capitalist consumption, but rather that poetry provides an ample space for *speculative imagining* of how to make these changes. Poetic speculation helps us think beyond the bounds of our current systems towards a future yet to be realized. In *Poesía practicable* (1990), Riechmann suggests a similar function of resistance in poetry:

La resistencia se concentra en focos, en vértices, en nudos de red. Por eso el

poema, con su exigencia de precisión estructural y de intensidad emotiva, constituye—a mi modo de ver—una forma literaria no inadecuada a los combates que libramos tras la gran derrota proletaria en la primera mitad de nuestro siglo.

(18)

If a poem is worth its ink, it is intensely woven like the “knots of a net.” It encourages us to slow down our daily experience of the world and read into the cracks of the world.<sup>14</sup> In one poem, Riechmann asks: “Lograremos volver a amar lo difícil?” (“Poemas” 31). As suggested above, poetry is a diagnosis of our current situation as well as a more positive prognosis for the future of the human race. Poetry’s “emotive intensity” opens new doors, to contemplate our own reaction *within* the chaotic forces of climate change and the apocalyptic (economic) mechanisms that are encouraging these dynamic shifts. In this way, Riechmann’s poetry becomes a space creatively anticipating the ecological limits that compose the planet’s precarious situation.

Riechmann’s poetry exercises this kind of resistance through rigorous self-reflexivity, allowing texts to work like moral compasses, openly reflecting on social and environmental problems. The most obvious instance of this is his constant mobilization of epigraphs, periphrases and allusions to other poets, playwrights, novelists, philosophers and ecologists, among other figures. *El común de los mortales* (2011), for instance, begins with four epigraphs from Semónides de Amorgos, Harold Norse, Solón de Atenas and R.H. Blyth.<sup>15</sup> This exercise of regular citation also occurs in his essays on ecology and philosophy. Indeed, many of his collections, such as *Poemas lisiados* (2012) begin and end with epigraphs, leaving the poet’s word in open dialogue with other diverse historical contexts and sources, including the reader’s own situation.

Poetry, in this open environment of signs, is less about writing on behalf of a specific position, whether for “a country, a patron, power,” poetry itself or even the environment (*Futuralgia* 486). Instead, it is about writing *with(in)* these various institutions, individuals and environments in a “democracy of objects.”<sup>16</sup> Riechmann’s texts embody what I describe as “a textual ecotone,” a point of confluence and transition between vastly different landscapes. This openness also invites the reader to respond to the demands of our precarious situation, or, put differently, to take part in the action of *combate cultural*. We are drawn into this dialogue in an almost physical manner. To consider Riechmann’s work as a collection of experimental landscapes, I will discuss one important trope appearing constantly throughout his work: the “meanwhile,” as it questions the efficacy of the local/global paradigms.

#### 1d. The Poetics of the Meanwhile

As the title suggests, Riechmann’s recent collection of poetry *El común de los mortales* speaks to the commons of all mortal beings. The text is divided into four parts: “Cuaderno del campo,” “Recortados contra la cal blanca,” “Las sienes mojadas,” and “El que pierde su nombre.” Each section dwells on a series of interrelated themes, each ultimately approaching one working question: what is the relationship between humanity, in its multiplicity of voices, and the surrounding world? Put simply, the text wonders about the relationship between *who* we are as political communities and *where* we are. “Who we are” is a question of cultural and political identity while “where we are” is an ecological analysis of land and resources. Reflecting on such a bond not only reflects on ecological issues but also their social implications. For Riechmann, this generates varying themes such as cultural production within global capitalism, growing old, human

relationships to animals, handicaps, love, and ensuing ecological crisis of climate change. To speak of these issues, the poetic voice sifts through a copious amount of epigraphs, allusions and paraphrases in order to *situate* current dilemmas within the contemporary political and ecological situation. An open textual ecology helps consider the ebb and flow of human communities.

In spite of the four marked divisions in *El común de los mortales*, there is another inferred division in the text. A substantial shift in tone occurs about halfway through the volume. While the first half positively speaks of the “better” elements of humanity, the second half offers a more pessimistic diagnosis of where we stand today. The poem marking this rift in tones is “Ecocidio” (“Ecocide”), a poem I will address in detail below. On this reading, the first half of the text reflects about how poetry contributes to the amelioration of humans and our relationships to others. “Somos / un instante / en la belleza del mundo (la dislocada belleza)” (26). These verses suggest a flawed state of affairs in which beauty has been dislocated or uprooted from our purview. However, they also contend that there are rich possibilities within the present moment. How do we gain access to these possibilities? A few pages later this question is posed: “¿capaces de escuchar de verdad / la voz del otro / ¿incluyendo a marmotas / cuervos tritones rebecos / y el hilo delgadísimo de voz que nos llega / de la bisnieta del tataranieta?” (35). The poem delivers a mandate posed as a rhetorical question: humans need to pay attention to what normally remains invisible and unheard in dominant ideology (i.e. capitalism). Alterity is not simply limited to human subjectivity. Instead, the “voice of the other” extends to include marmots, crows and antelopes. These others, what Riechmann



describes as “seres paradisiacos,” gesture at what is missing in a purely human point of view and the need to listen to what lies outside of it (33).

Language helps compensate for this lack. The poem “Doble vínculo” speaks of a double bind between language and the world:

El lenguaje / que como en tantas leyendas una ninfa / quiere arrastrarnos a su  
reino líquido: / que remiten / uno a otro en deriva circular / y el mundo / áspero—  
como decía el poeta—: / sus diez mil seres erizados / de resistencias y filos / y  
vibraciones y golpes y caricias / donde la transparencia / es sólo una instantánea  
jugada al azar / desde el mundo / fidelidad al lenguaje / desde el lenguaje  
fidelidad al mundo (40)

Language, as an operating force, draws us into the liquid realm of varying significations. *El mundo áspero*, a reference to the Spanish poet Ángel González, constantly alters these meanings through its resistance, vibrations, and dynamism.<sup>17</sup> This double bind between world and language argues that the relationship is ultimately about bio-physiological changes of the environment that affect meaning. But it is also the world that is dependent upon the careful attention of the reader in order to give it meaning. Poetry is able to bring out the play between language and its environmental sources. A poem that follows “Doble vínculo,” “El oficio de vivir,” wagers that: “En el pozo del lenguaje / las oraciones por pronunciar: son infinitas” (42). The poet and the reader have an ethics to follow in the fidelity of language, to sift through meanings in a rapidly changing world.

Riechmann takes this poetics in a direction similar to the Spanish social poetry of the 1950s, urging for a greater consciousness of this close relationship between world and language.<sup>18</sup> However, there is a key difference between Riechmann’s position and that of

the 1950s. Riechmann does not accept that poetic language makes the world transparent. On the contrary, there are zones of opacity “within the human heart” as well as within the world of “extension” (*Morada* 138). The critical reception of this project has described it as “poesía de conciencia,” “poesía de experiencia,” or “poesía de la diferencia” (Iravedra 4; Cahill 468). While the first three monikers refer to the ethical stance in Riechmann’s poetry, poetry of difference marks the rejection of dominant schools of poetry such as poetry of experience and *los novísimos*, whose work is more intellectual. Jonathan Mayhew’s term, “poetry of difference,” comes closest to the mark because it is “a blanket term” meant to encompass political poetry that deals with “extreme or marginal subjectivities” (*Twilight* 38). If marginal subjectivity excludes other-than-human voices, then this term becomes inadequate for our purposes. In my view, the term poetic realism is most fitting of Riechmann’s overall poetics because his project programmatically extends the space of the poem. The humanized space of the poem extends to the natural world. Riechmann’s poetry speaks of many tropes that are almost constant to the medium of poetry, such as death and love. In contrast to poetic traditions from courtly love and pastoral poems to romanticism and modernism, “Para escribir poesía” means that “No escribo poesía inocente. / No entiendo / las palabras *poesía inocente*” (*Futuralgia* 278). *Poesía pura*, inwardly absorbed, is blind in its vision, the same poem explains.<sup>19</sup> Such a provocation against *poesía pura* brings to mind my own critique of landscape esthetics, a genre traditionally blind to what lies outside of the frame and human vision.

Instead of isolating a poetic theme within the space of the poem, the double bind between world and language brings them back down to earth, to conjure what Riechmann describes as “realismo de desconsuelo,” not in the sense that these texts only look at the

most vile and disgusting sense of human existence, but rather that they locate the lofty themes of poetry in the mundane. In “Detrás de las palabras” the poet informs us that “La poesía intenta / que detrás de las palabras / haya vida” (50). This realism is addressed directly in a poem simply entitled “Realismo:” “Escribir lo que somos / lo que no somos / lo que hubiéramos sido / lo que ya nunca seremos / lo que podríamos ser” (54). What makes this *realismo de desconsuelo* particularly ecological is not only its open discussion of environmental issues but also that it delivers a pathos of grief derived from the ecological crisis. *Desconsuelo*, after all, physically connotes grief within the pit of the stomach.

As mentioned above, the poem “Ecocidio” divides Riechmann’s 2011 collection of poetry, *El común de los mortales*. A poem of 12 cantos, “Ecocidio” is the longest in the volume and, more importantly, demarcates an important shift in tone for the text. The first half of the volume functions more as an elegy, praising the prospects of a kind of fractured paradise for all beings on this planet. Though it does continue to produce occasional jabs at neoliberal policies and their ecological fallout, the first half also wants to trace out moments of contact that are ultimately positive. The second half, however, dwells on the darker side of the capitalist imaginary. It wants to draw out the role of the outside (i.e. nature) in our daily living and codes (such as language, economies, mass media fantasies, etc.). “Ecocidio” is a transitional piece that speaks to the two halves it divides. I will quote the poem in full in two separate sections.

I

El mismo día / en que un escalofrío nos recorre la espalda / al saber que por vez  
primera en la historia humana / está libre de hielos el paso del Noroeste / (y puede

por tanto navegarse entre una Groenlandia / y un Canadá que se están / calentando  
/ muy rápidamente / nos enteramos de que la Event Management / es una industria  
incipiente en España  
/ pero de enorme potencial / en una economía de mercado en pleno crecimiento /  
entre otras jugosas noticias / exprimidas en las páginas salmón / de la prensa seria  
/ ¿Cómo no darse cuenta de que / por más que nos neguemos a reconocerlo / en  
realidad no lo ignoramos: / el *juggernaut* triunfa / el tiempo se agota / la suerte /  
está / echada?

## II

Crecimiento del 3% / para apuntalar los beneficios del 20% / a eso lo llaman  
economía / y nosotros sabemos que es / la destrucción del mundo

## III

Margaret Thatcher decía / que un hombre de más de treinta años / que viaje en  
autobús—no en avión o automóvil— / ha de considerarse fracasado / ése es el  
evangelio / de la destrucción del mundo: / y le sobran profetas

## IV

Casi nada / de lo que podemos decir está a la altura / de la potencia destructiva  
que a veces / llamamos *juggernaut* / (y otras veces / sencillamente / capitalismo) /  
pero la solución / tampoco es la mudez

## V

Cuando diseñan ciudades / no se acuerdan de los peatones / y cuando preparan  
comidas / no tienen en cuenta a los vegetarianos / pero eso sí / santifican todo /  
con el beato adjetivo / *sostenible* (129-32)

Though the opening lines do not admit it, the poem begins as a reflection piece upon reading a newspaper (*la prensa seria*). This is significant because “the salmon-colored pages” of the paper serve as a nexus of global confluence, a point of contact with the world at large. Yet the opening lines are not simply about the detached reception of current events, acknowledging what it is the reader already knows, but rather about the chilling effect of reading about global warming. The chill from the first verses marks a global, shared time (*el mismo día*) of an event: when it was discovered in 2009 that the Northwest Passage was navigable for the first time in human history. Yet the cause of this local reaction is inherently elsewhere (e.g. the Arctic). Poetically this brings into contact two distinct ecosystems: the melting icecaps of the Northwest Passage, in this case, and the civilized reading of a newspaper elsewhere. Instead of passively absorbing current events, the “juice” or pulp is “squeezed” or rendered from the paper, making it physically tangible. In other words, reading current events, as a leisure time activity, (*tiempo libre*) becomes a radical act of *tiempo liberado*.<sup>20</sup> The poem itself becomes a conduit, or point of tension between the epistemological break between nature and civilization and, indeed, works to bring the two locations onto the same poetic plane because of the visceral shock experienced by the newspaper reader. Considered as a conduit, then, the poem itself becomes a transition point, a textual ecotone between two very different but interconnected environments. The plight of ecosystems extends well into the civilized act of reading a newspaper.

The text expands from here to offer local effects based on new global realities related to climate change. Indeed, these first five sections offer a critique on a wide variety of issues related to climate change and capitalism, including media coverage,

urban transportation, food consumption, and introduce the illusive actant, the “*Juggernaut*,” referring to the economic model of a growth economy. Notably, these are not simply environmental concerns but intimately tied to social problems. Indeed, ecocide is not simply about ecosystems far away but also about human communities. The question of transportation, for instance, is discussed in the third canto, when the poet condemns British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s vision of the matured (male) individual as someone owning a car and constantly traveling by plane (if not owning his own). Reflecting on this ecological footprint, the poem describes this vision as a prophecy of “destruction” because it is clearly untenable in a world of limited resources. “*Ecocidio*” concentrates disparate landscapes into the single prism of the poem-about-a-newspaper, speaking to the ensuing affect of *desconsuelo*. Yet the poem, embodied in the chill, also conveys what a newspaper is unable to textually convey: our visceral reactions to experiencing climate change. Consequently, the poem serves as an example of what I have described as experimental landscapes, as it questions the scope and scale of human awareness around climate change.

These first five cantos also establish a clear opposition between “nosotros” and ellos” (us and them). At first glance, the stark division between them and us is political in nature. *Nosotros* encompasses the political left while *ellos* refers to “the prophets of destruction.” And, though the text is a focused scathing critique of “ellos,” “nosotros” is not left as a collection of passive observers. Instead, “we” are implicated in these surprising new realities. In canto four, the poet discloses that “casi nada / de lo que podemos decir está a la altura / de la potencia destructiva,” but the remedy is not to be found in *mudez* (silence). One should add that the answer is also not mere critique.

Instead, “Ecocidio” offers critiques that are also thinly veiled proposals for building new designs, creating different networks and overcoming century-long assumptions that civilization is on a higher plane than the natural world. Part five speaks to this technique, lamenting that cities are designed without consideration for pedestrians; food is cooked without concern for vegetarians. But these criticisms also suggest that cities should consider walking as a point of departure for future design, or that animals should not be the cornerstone of human cuisine. As a textual ecotone, “Ecocidio” experiments with these issues in a global confluence that places them all on equal footing.

From part six to twelve, the text extends its scale outwards into other landscapes and issues.

## VI

Desde la luna / o desde la Estación Espacial Internacional / poquísimas obras  
humanas son visibles / las pirámides de Egipto / o la Gran Muralla china / o la  
Acrópolis de Atenas / sin ir más lejos resultan / indecibles / en cambio / el mar  
de plástico de los invernaderos en el Poniente almeriense / —una gran mancha  
blanca sobre la tierra ocre— / se ve bien

## VII

Los últimos glaciares del Pirineo se funden / ¿Por qué tan pocos saben hoy / leer  
en ese hielo las señales de las tiranías que vendrán?

## VIII

Mientras en la Antártida se cuartejan y desprenden / las masas de hielo de la  
plataforma Wilkins / nos angustia que no se vendan suficientes automóviles /  
Retóricamente nos preguntamos: ¿estamos locos? / sólo para evitar reconocer lo

obvio: / La demencia del sistema

## IX

Maximizar / ¿a costa de lo que sea? / Es la locura / de la civilización de la *hybris* /

Aunque lo llamemos sociedad industrial

## X

La locura / de vivir como si no hubiese afuera: / Fuera de la psique / fuera del  
lenguaje / fuera de la cultura / fuera de la ciudad / fuera de la economía / fuera de  
la clase social / fuera de la razón / fuera del mito... / Pero en todos estos casos hay  
afueras / y desatenderlas se convierte en una trampa mortal

## XI

Bienintencionados / sermones / pagados por la fundación de algún gran banco/  
*Eventos* con aire acondicionado / lindas azafatas / y leves canapés de *nouvelle*  
*cuisine* / Invocados ámbitos de libertad / y osadías cognoscitivas / que no llegan  
más allá de las paredes / de la sala / Qué fácil y gustoso coincidir / con nuestra  
propia virtud / imaginaria / Y luego todos / de vuelta al hogar/ con el alma  
burbujeante / la conciencia tranquila / y la misma obscena pasividad de fondo /  
apenas levemente repeinada

## XII

Inútil amor / el que no engendra amor / Inútil saber / el que no pone coto a la  
destrucción / Inútiles días / los de quien sólo se lamenta y no actúa. (132-36)

The leap from section five to six works like a cinematic jumpcut. The panoply of  
landscapes zooms out further to analyze the major human accomplishments and disasters



as seen from the moon. While some architectural icons are visible from space, so too is the sea of plastic-covered greenhouses located in the *Poniente almariense* in the south of Spain.<sup>21</sup> Riechmann's point is to pan out from society into the slow-moving, less visible natural disasters happening all around the globe: "Los últimos glaciares del Pirineo se funden." We worry about selling cars; meanwhile, massive chunks of ice are splitting off in the Wilkins Ice Shelf.<sup>22</sup> As my paraphrase of Riechmann's verses suggests, these are examples of some major geological changes that *are occurring* in the Anthropocene. But these events cannot be captured in the traditional view of a landscape. Riechmann's experimental landscapes lend us telescopes in order to see these phenomena. The scope of "Ecocidio" suggests that ignoring climate change is an act of insanity. Yet it remains invisible if our only concern is to sell more cars. Indeed, the act of the experimental landscape is to expose our inattention as an act of insanity.

This poetic exercise has much in common with a phenomenon that philosopher and videogame designer Ian Bogost describes as the "meanwhile" (59-61).<sup>23</sup> In *Alien Phenomenology* (2012), Bogost argues that reflecting on simultaneous but separate activities across different continents and regions provides a space for thinking beyond merely human action. Thinking about the meanwhile calls attention to what is occurring outside of a given system but is potentially connected to it. This language argues that, while we are carrying out our human centered dramas, the icecaps are melting whether we consent to it or not. Consequently, what I will call the "meanwhile trope" gives shape to how seemingly separate and local ecosystems are in fact interlocked within a global framework. The death of ecosystems not only entails the sixth mass extinction period,

now underway, but also the disappearances of entire human communities dependent on the wellbeing of these systems.

What is most troubling about the meanwhile is how little this ecological phenomenon informs our behavior. Indeed, in a certain sense we know very well the impacts of our actions. Yet, as Riechmann points out, we maintain a will not to know or, put better, to act *as if* there were no outside.<sup>24</sup> This outside refers to the modern split between nature and culture discussed earlier via Latour. “Ecocidio” denounces this divide as possibly the greatest (and most futile) human act of hybris because the stakes have been raised for all mortals to the level of survival or extinction. “Ecocidio” is not simply ecocide but also homicide. “El común de los mortales” is what all mortals share, whether human or otherwise. This is precisely the darker message at work in the second half of the volume. Interconnectedness becomes terrifying in its hypothetical and actual consequences.<sup>25</sup>

These commons, the totality of planetary ecosystems, appear constantly throughout Riechmann’s work. “Yo celebro,” for instance, introduces the fourth part of *Cuaderno de Berlín* (1989). “Canto / mientras mueren mares que no he navegado / selvas que no he hollado / ciudades que no he conocido” (*Futuralgia* 201). The poet’s song, marked with the active first person voice, “celebrates” and “sings” within an environment sketched out in the poem. This celebration, however, is charred with the destruction of cities, seas and jungles yet to be seen. Ironically, celebration becomes an act of mourning (*desconsuelo*). Textuality extends beyond the lines of an ordered literary space and into the world itself, engaging with environmentality itself. Poetry, on this view, is not simply born from other literary texts but from stormy seas and growing cities. This open textual

ecology consequently promotes greater environmental consciousness not because it writes *of* the environment but because it writes *with* the environment.

“Cicatriz fértil” from *Cántico de erosión* (1987) makes this point clear:

Sueño de soledad vivida hasta las heces, / hasta el lecho del río, / la herida del  
torrente, / la dura lengua sin tregua del glaciar / Sueño de sorda sangre ebriamente  
libre, / en comunión animal con el relámpago. (159)

A dream as lived solitude approaches other noises, creaks and cracks found in a riverbed, a thunderstorm and the severe tongue of a glacier. The effect of this poetic vision is not only to gesture at the ecological meanwhile, but to draw out its language into the verses of the poem, to connect the double bind between language and world. As we read this poem, landscapes far and near take on a different significance because we become aware of the nonhuman “voices” at work in the environment. Consequently, their presence becomes visible and audible.

La inmensidad trágica del devenir humano se desarrolla en lo escondido, pasa inadvertida a su propio sufrimiento. A quien se asomó al abismo le escarnecen el rostro demudado, *mientras* la titánica bola de acero continúa rodando sordamente. (*Futuralgia* 168)

This is the epitomy of *realismo de desconsuelo*, a visceral mourning of our own inaction on climate change. Though the evidence is in, little is being done to affect more sustainable living.

The result is an open textual ecology, similar to what Julia Kristeva has called the genotext, the “bio-physiological” processes at work within the phenotext, the visible stratus of socio-linguistic codes.

The former includes drives, their disposition, and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-Oedipal relations with parents. (*Kristeva Reader* 120)

The phenotext “encompasses the emergence of object and subject” through the advent of meaning. Connecting the phenotext to the genotext involves “transfers of drive energies” in the very materiality of language (Ibid). The genotext, then, is the ontological source of meanings and accounts for the invisible sources for an object of inquiry. Moreover, Kristeva’s terminology directly connects linguistic meaning to the environment. Poetry, as a site of “intense” linguistic experimentation, allows us to view the often hidden connections between environmental conditions (genotext) and meaning (phenotext). I find it useful to think of genotext as the infinite, polyrhythmic possibilities of sound (linguistic or otherwise), which, if left alone, remain in chaotic cacophony. Conversely, the phenotext is like a musical composition, one possible ordering among many that privileges certain sounds while ghosting others. As a listener or reader it is not only imperative to decipher the internal harmony of the composition, but also to relate the text to its larger environmental text. Self-reflexivity in poetry, also known as *metapoesía*, is an attempt to regain contact between text and its larger environment. The poem bends back on itself to comment on its own contact with its surrounding elements. *Metapoesía*, then, is inherently environmental.

Critic Timothy Morton argues that Kristeva’s conceptual paring of genotext/phenotext implies that meaning is entangled in its environment.

Texts have environments. These environments are made of signs, yet the matter-sign distinction breaks down at a certain point, because one of these environments

is *the* environment. There is more than a neat chiasmic symmetry here, a strange entanglement in which we cannot distinguish between what counts as an entity ‘in’ an environment and an entity ‘in’ a text. For if we are to think text rigorously, we end up with Derrida’s famous formulation ‘*Il n’y a pas d’hors-texte*,’ ‘There is no outside-text’. No textuality can rigorously distinguish between inside and outside, because that is precisely what textuality both broaches and breeches.

(“Text as Ecology” 3)

As discussed above, Riechmann brings out this inseparability through a reoccurring discussion of world and text. These texts generate a space open to dialogue and questioning between the reader and her surroundings. In so doing, his poetry also tends to obscure the typical borders between the inside of a text and its outside—because the outside, such as the Wilkins Artic Shelf, *Poniente almariense* or the melting glaciers of the Pyrenees, is very much at play within each text. The borders between what the text voices on the page and what the text references are ambiguous. Indeed, there is a constant worry to consider what is outside of a poem, a conversation or a political debate. In one poem, poetry is born in “un taller sin interior” (*Futuraligia* 278). Moreover, this “breech” of textuality is not simply about an exchange of human linguistic signs, but between a plurality of different objects, each “speaking” or projecting its presence in a “lenguaje secreto” (487). Recalling my analogy of the musical composition, to respond to this secret language, the reader must “listen” carefully to the multitudinous sounds evoked by the composition.

The poetic space, following this model, draws us intimately close to the questions that Riechmann raises about humanity and the precarious moment for the ecology of the

entire planet. This openness introduces the meanwhile as a major technique for highlighting ecology within cultural objects because it places climate change within the prism of local experience.

1e. “La ciudad-bosque:” Towards a breakdown of the urban/rural divide

Despite the dark tone of “Ecocidio,” Riechmann is not a pessimist. Ecosocialism remains a very real and viable option. Riechmann’s essays on the subject practically sketch out the ethics submitted in his poetry. As the term itself suggests, ecosocialism combines environmental concerns with the social wellbeing of society.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the tenets of freemarket capitalism, ecosocialism argues that markets should be regulated to prevent human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Riechmann explains: “las condiciones de sustentabilidad ecológica y las exigencias sociales de justicia tienen que operar como límites externos para los mercados” (*El socialismo* 142). Instead of privileging the free market at all costs, Riechmann argues that economic regulation is needed in order for humans and nonhumans to be free.<sup>27</sup> Spain’s contemporary political mode is plagued with economic crises. Politicians, economists and, with less publicity, ecologists have put forward many different proposals that “regulate” or “rescue” the more unstable aspects of the financial global markets in the country (even if little reform has actually been carried out). What makes ecosocialism distinct in its approach is the contention that growth model economies should be rejected wholesale. This camp of ecology, Riechmann included, argues that a steady state model is the only real sustainable economy (Czech 5-7). In contrast to a growth model, the steady state paradigm maintains homeostasis as its principle-operating notion. Riechmann describes this succinctly: “todo se orienta a buscar *lo suficiente* en vez de perseguir *siempre más*” (*Socialismo* 155). Of

course, in contrast to other hypothetical regulations, this proposal is much more drastic because it entails a wholesale rejection of the principle that economic “development” is the ideal measurement and value for nation-states across the globe. In contrast, ecosocialism maintains that a steady state economy is more ideal precisely because it aims to function *within the natural limits of the planet*.

If ecosocialism is indeed radical in its position, how will it be possible to carry out such a paradigm shift? Riechmann also offers a number of concrete actions that would lead to a steady state economy. Biomimesis and ecoefficiency are two possible principles that would structurally challenge our current global economy. Biomimesis is a techno-economic (as well as cultural) concept that argues that human technology and production should operate in accordance with the biosphere: “El metabolismo urbano, industrial, agrario, debe parecerse cada vez más al funcionamiento de los ecosistemas naturales” (“Biomímesis” 8). Ecoefficiency, as a related idea, encourages the use of renewable resources and energy. I would also suggest that this shift is cultural. Cultural production that either patently or latently addresses problems related to globalization, climate change and the loss of biodiversity is a significant step to encourage social awareness of these issues. This helps us imagine the scope and direness of these problems. But what does this cultural and technological shift specifically require?

Interestingly, these principles relate to practices typically associated with rural living.<sup>28</sup> At the end of *El socialismo puede llegar sólo en bicicleta* (2012), the penultimate chapter offers a series of steps to change the state of urban living leading up to the concept of “la ciudad-bosque.” Unlike an urbanization model based on the growth of a city, which foment *more* housing and *more* industry, *la ciudad-bosque* harkens back

to an “urbanismo utópico del siglo XIX” (234).<sup>29</sup> In its current apparition, the city remains a contested space within environmentalist debates. On one extreme, Riechmann mentions ecologist Keith Farnish, who advocates for an ultimate abolishment of cities because of their ecological fallout. On this view, cities utilize large amounts of resources and terrain (far beyond the “walls” of the city) and have no connection to the source of these resources. Sustainable living requires “an exodus from civilization” and a return to hunting and gathering communities (222). Riechmann rightly points out that such a drastic step would simply not sustain the human population at its current and growing numbers (Ibid). Civilization, for Riechmann, is not inherently the problem. Instead, it is the ecological disconnection produced in contemporary forms of urban living that should be corrected. Cities not only disconnect humans from the sources of their food but also dehumanize social interactions into a grid of commodity fetishisms. In other words, the city has become a concentrated site of consumption instead of production and coexistence:

Con una población de 9.000 millones, hemos de pensar en algunos territorios con densidad de población elevada—ciudades—y en sistemas agroalimentarios de elevada productividad—agricultura intensiva. La cuestión es: ¿qué clase de ciudades, y qué clase de agricultura intensiva? Y la pregunta más general asociada con esas dos: ¿cómo gestionamos la complejidad? (223)

These questions open up the concept of city instead of wholesale rejecting it. Most importantly, the city is put into the logistical context of “intensive farming,” an issue often invisible in discussions of urban culture. That is to say, it is not that there is no such thing as an urban ecosystem, but rather that the ecological and social costs of urban living



remain undetected in current political discourse. To consider urban sustainability is to consider the city in the larger context of the hinterland used for food and energy production. The conjunction between the urban and the rural begins to undo centuries-old dichotomies between the countryside and the metropolis, between landscape and cityscape.

What is needed, then, is “an ecological conception of the city” (230). Riechmann provides a 12-part proposal that helps dissect this unvoiced ecosystem and argue for “un metabolismo biofísico sostenible y [una] democracia participativa” (232). These key aspects include: renewable energies towards self-sufficiency, “collective” transportation, the realization that “lo cercano es lo hermoso,” limits to growth, policies against “functional” segregation, *la ciudad-bosque*, strong community participation, *gestión de la demanda* (demand for utilities, etc.), municipal environmental taxes, and external evaluation of energy policies. While there is no space to focus on each aspect of this proposal, I will comment briefly on the concept of *ciudad-bosque* because it speaks directly to revising the divides between the polis and nature and between the city and the countryside.

On the face of the issue, *la ciudad-bosque* seems to argue for more green spaces such as parks or wildlife reserves. These kinds of spaces are in fact antithetical to the spirit of *ciudad-bosque* because they still isolate animals and plant life from human activity. Cities need to include more animals and plant life *throughout* the city. Such an action not only underscores the disconnection between the urban and the rural but also begins to alleviate the “distance” between the biosphere and human communities. That is

to say, *ciudad-bosque* creates human and nonhuman alliances that ultimately extend ecosystems into urban consciousness:

Si tal fuera la trayectoria descrita por la humanidad en la primera y accidentada fase de su paso por este planeta, si durante todo este periodo la ciudad se alejó del bosque, destruyó el bosque y negó el bosque [...] ha llegado el momento sin embargo de enderezar el paso civilizatorio hacia otro rumbo, desandando lo andado. La civilización futura se definirá entonces por el entañamiento de las comunidades humanas en su entorno natural. (234-35)

Future co-existence, in contrast to the dominant “trajectory of humanity,” makes visible a diversity of human and nonhuman voices throughout the polis. In my view, Riechmann’s plan is a way to ruralize the city, or, in other words, to overcome the disconnection between human living and the biosphere. In his article “Spanish Revolution 2.0,” Jorge Gaupp-Berghausen has laid out similar proposals tied to the 15-M movement and the overall malcontent of the Spanish population after the 2008 financial crisis. Gaupp-Berghausen notes, for instance, that Spaniards are creating urban gardens, with more than twenty in Madrid alone. Furthermore, a new exodus of young people have left urban centers, in many cases due to economic necessity, in order to create *eco-aldeas*, townships that “build a sustainable existence, respectful of nature and one another” (Gaupp-Berghausen). Finally, many activist groups argue that the economic crisis yields a perfect space to consider alternative economic models, such as Riechmann’s steady state economy. Though such a statement may seem idealistic, Riechmann’s poetry shows the perils of the status quo and urges us to re-think the daily practices of human communities.

#### 1f. Conclusions: La ciudad-bosque as prolepsis

In this chapter I have discussed several aspects of Riechmann's work that merge together to form a poetics of experimental landscapes. His texts work as prisms, channeling often incomprehensible and invisible phenomena onto an intimately local level. That is to say, readers decipher how the global extends into the local, how the wellbeing of ecosystems extends to the wellbeing of human communities.

The result is a confluence between the local and global scales commonly used to discuss and debate environmental policy. His poetry exhibits an open ecology of signs, composed of epigraphs, allusions and paraphrases that invite the reader to actively engage in dialogue with the text. Riechmann radicalizes this textuality through the constant provocation of the ecological meanwhile: conjuring up disparate landscapes and climates into the space of a single poem. This poetic action works as a transitional space or textual ecotone, which highlights the effects of human activity across the planet. Poetic compositions are able to speculate and "play out" relationships between environments and texts, events and human and nonhuman affects.

It is not the case that we do not understand these connections but they often remain hidden beneath the surface of political discourse. Though his tone is often one of environmental loss (*desconsuelo*), Riechmann also offers practical solutions that challenge contemporary divisions between civilization (*polis*) and nature and between the urban and the rural. Experimental landscapes suggest that these two questions are interrelated to the point of asking the same question: what is the politics of the future? Riechmann's work, then, is evident of ecological culture that thinks beyond the boundaries of our current systems through prolepsis, leaping towards a futurity yet to be

realized. These concepts open up a new paradigmatic space in which to consider Iberia as a nexus of global and local events as well as a set of communities intimately “entangled” in their surrounding ecosystems.

## **Chapter II: Experiment**

Las autopistas, demasiado llenas  
los senderos,  
demasiado vacíos  
-Jorge Riechmann

### **2a. Art as Ecological Action**

Joan Nogué, professor of human geography and director of *L'Observatori del Paisatge* in Olot, Catalonia, is interested in tracking local landscape changes due to globalization. Throughout his work, largely a contribution to what is known as humanist geography, Nogué argues that landscapes are coterminous with culture.<sup>30</sup> The composition of landscape is due to historically specific interactions between culture and nature. Thus dynamic socio-ecological shifts ultimately affect landscapes. Take, for instance, demographic changes between cities and countrysides. Nogué observes that, while 10 percent of the world population lived in cities in 1900, at the beginning of the twenty first century over 50 percent of the human populace now lives in cities (with 80 percent in Europe, the US and Australia) ("Entre" 257). Cities, and the lifestyles they represent, are epicenters in the aforementioned Anthropocene.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the lines between the rural and the urban have also become more tenuous, as the countryside has become largely mechanized and factory farms have become urbanized through the normalization of economic commodities (Harvey XV). These changes in the structure and size of human communities drastically alter our interactions with surrounding territories and the shape of those surroundings.

In turn, this affects how local cultural identities are construed. Nogué describes the typical conception of localism through the triad of nature-culture-region. The term suggests that a particular environment's collection of flora and fauna along with the

area's cultural and geographical idiosyncrasies compose a region's landscape. However, if landscape, as the traditional stable backdrop for a region, is in a state of disarray, then ecological and cultural particularism, as the bedrock of a region, is also in a critical state of fragility. What is needed, then, is new visual language that conveys this ecological instability, an alternative I will consider below through a triad of eco-techno-symbolic order.

In chapter one, Jorge Riechmann's *realismo de desconsuelo* demonstrated what I called the poetics of the meanwhile: a transitional plane between global and local phenomena. His poetry delivers the monstrous scale of climate change events, such as melting Arctic icecaps, to the level of human affect. The poetic space channels distant ecosystems into the polis itself in order to create a kind of *combate cultural* on behalf of nonhuman beings. Riechmann's poetic act questions the nature/culture divide because it places all of these events on an equal political playing field. We also observed a parallel divide between the urban and the rural. As Riechmann suggested, it becomes necessary to question this cultural and material divide in order to understand the ecological impact of contemporary cities. After all, urban ecosystems extend far beyond the walls of the polis. Riechmann introduces the proposal of the *ciudad-bosque* as means to create a sustainable equilibrium between the city and its surroundings, between culture and nature (i.e. the space of landscapes). This theoretical and poetic unhinging of civilization and nature also destabilizes visual representations of landscapes, such as photography and painting, which often reify the distinction between nature and culture. Serving as the visual approach to the poetic side of chapter one, this chapter traces Nogué's thesis that cultural representations of landscape, predicated on nature-culture-region, are in crisis mode. I

turn to visual experimental landscapes of Catalan artists Sabadell Artiga and Perejaume as a visual reboot of how to consider our surroundings in an age of globalization and climate change.

## 2b. Localism: Situating the Traditional Triad of Nature-culture-region

*L'Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya* is located in Olot, a town in the province of Girona, surrounded by the Batet, Marboleny and Saint Valentí mountain ranges. The institution is part of *Llei de protecció, gestió i ordenació del paisatge de Catalunya*, passed in 2004, indicative of a larger trend throughout Europe to protect natural and cultural landscapes. The Observatory functions as an administrative hub, a publishing house and an educational resource on a variety of issues related to the preservation of landscapes, including: sustainable development, urban landscapes, peripheral landscapes, globalization, ecological degradation and heritage preservation.<sup>32</sup>

The Observatory's mission statement summarizes:

L'Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya és un ens d'assessorament de l'administració catalana i de conscienciació de la societat en general en matèria de paisatge. La seva creació respon a la necessitat d'estudiar el paisatge, elaborar propostes i impulsar mesures de protecció, gestió i ordenació del paisatge de Catalunya en el marc d'un desenvolupament sostenible. ("l'Observatori")

What makes the Observatory a particularly effective tool for landscape preservation and sustainable development is its multiplatform structure. The observatory works in conjunction with the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, municipal governments, a network of universities and the Council of Europe. In this way, the Observatory functions as a center for original thought and research as well as preservationist projects.

The Observatory's mission statement is primarily based on the European Landscapes Convention, passed in Florence in 2000 by the Council of Europe. Citing the Council of Europe's goal to foment unity between its member states, the Convention argues that landscape is one field for preserving heritage as well as promoting "sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment" (1). The Convention goes on to explain that, "landscapes contribute to the formation of local cultures" and, "to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity" (Ibid). However, the next paragraph of the Preamble also signals that this "consolidated" well-being is actually in a state of disequilibrium: from urban areas to the countryside from "areas of high quality" to "degraded areas," landscape is important for the quality of life, but is not universally protected. In order to combat these issues, signatories to the Convention must "recognize landscape in law as an essential component of people's surroundings...and a foundation of their identity" and implement laws to protect, manage and plan landscape policy. These policies should involve governments on local, regional and national levels.<sup>33</sup> In particular, "landscape policy" means awareness raising, training and education, identification and assessment (Ibid).

What are the subtexts of this Convention? If landscapes are, as Nogué suggested, the meeting point between culture and nature, then they generally reflect the economic and social activity of that people. Traditionally, landscapes are important sectors of the economy such as tourism, small-scale agriculture or national parks, insofar as their "idiosyncrasies" attract attention to a particular region. The Convention suggests that landscape preservation and "green" jobs writ large should constitute a larger portion of



national economies. But these areas are increasingly open to newer markets that participate in the global flow of goods and services. The Convention's language overtly points to the need for a transnational organization to *preserve* local landscapes and cultures because of perceived and real threats related to economic globalization and the subsequent urbanization processes underway throughout the world. But what specifically constitutes this threat? The notion of "disequilibrium" also suggests deeper wounds lurking in Europe. Some terrains will receive protection while others will be sacrificed in the name of development. The latter category is one we will later explore as peripheral landscapes. The 2008 financial crisis has illustrated the deep wounds created between the "development" of built environments (i.e. real estate) and the instability of capital. In *Rebel Cities* (2012), David Harvey argues that urbanization has absorbed much of the excess capital from the global economy. And this urbanization has had nowhere else to go but out, expanding construction projects into regions that were typically immune to the drastic changes of the metropolis. (These are, in effect, what we often refer to as "sprawlsapes.") After the 2008 financial crisis, such investments in real estate and construction help explain why there are so many half-completed construction projects throughout Spain. This economic phenomenon has also led to a further privatization of public urban and rural spaces because it is largely private funding (and not public) that lies behind these built environments. These economic factors explain aspects of the disequilibrium alluded to in the Convention.

In "Territorio sin discurso" (2006) Nogué outlines five major challenges for landscape studies vis-à-vis the disequilibrium created by rampant urbanization and globalization. For Nogué, landscape is the result of human interaction with nature.

Historically, as cultures self-identified via territory, this same geography became intertwined with human identity. While landscape is charged with cultural signification, it is also a spatial projection of how this given culture operates: “[el paisaje] es la proyección cultural de una sociedad en un espacio determinado” (“Territorio” 51).<sup>34</sup> Nogué gives this projection discursive shape, describing it as a narrative structure giving the contours of a signified terrain. Consequently, just as cultural forces are always in historical motion, so follow the composition and affects of landscape. The most troubling aspects of globalization have to do with the speed of changes to built and (natural) environments. Territorial changes, whether due to exploding demographics or mining operations, have sped up to a point to where “traditional” discourses no longer apply to the shape of the actual terrain, leaving real landscapes fragmented and peripheral. Put simply, material changes outpace landscape esthetics. The human inhabitants of these lands, then, are also left to wonder about how to relate to these new surroundings.

As mentioned above, many of these changes are driven by economic factors, such as the standardization of economic goods and stores. But it also has to do with the pervasive presence of telecommunications, which today weave the “web” that seems to function so well as a metaphor for globalization. Nogué identifies four problems that stem from the challenge of globalization: hybridity, legibility, invisibility and the subsequent crisis of representation (Ibid 52).

Traditionally landscapes are born of the triad of nature-culture-region. In an essay fleshing out the methods of humanist geography, Nogué provides an example of what this triad entails. He takes up the case study of La Garrotxa in Catalonia, which illustrates his position about landscape as a visible, unifying anchor to local experience. He interviewed

artists and farmers that work closely with the land. These perspectives in La Garrotxa weave an “ecological phenomenology.” Following David Seamon, Nogué posits that there are two possible ways to “experience a terrain.” First, there is a textual, mediated interpretation, which studies literature, painting, architecture and photography (165). Second, one might learn of a landscape through firsthand contact through travel, work and exploration. In each case, the terrain will emit a certain character, a visible feel for human beings. Vocational differences between the artist and the farmer produce a different experience of the topography. While the farmers interviewed display a pragmatic and “corporeal” knowledge of the environment, the painter is more “holistic,” “looking at the environment as a combination of colors, volumes and forms” (173). Nogué blends different human perspectives of a terrain in order to discern a larger picture of its varying importance. In this way, landscape is not just a window into *a* soul, but rather a common place for multiple views and experiences. Human vision leaves the center stage and becomes a part of a larger narrative web, anchored into a common world. The result is an overlap of perspectives without providing any kind of hierarchical judgments about what determines this viewpoint. Put differently, this overlap creates an ecotone of cultural differences, predicated on one’s labor and connection to the natural world. (A vision similar to Riechmann’s poetic ecotone.) What is important to emphasize in the case of Garrotxa is that the signs, narratives and work ethics co-mingle with the state of the land itself. The agricultural and artistic *representations* (*el significante*) of the terrain somewhat resemble the state of the land itself (*lo significado*).<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, current manifestations of hybrid landscapes resist this traditional triad of nature-culture-region. Nogué argues that we do not yet have the analytical language to discuss what these new terrains mean for human experience (let alone for the natural world itself). What we have at hand are “*terrains vagues*,” enigmatic ghost towns (or ghostscapes) that feel demoralized, dehumanized and denaturalized due to the real effects of socio-economic factors.

Son los paisajes que alternan, sin solución de continuidad, terrenos intersticiales despoblados y abandonados, polígonos industriales, viviendas dispersas, edificaciones efímeras, vertederos incontrolados, cementerios de coches, almacenes precarios, viveros, construcciones a medias, muros divisorios dejados de la mano de Dios, líneas de alta tensión, antenas de telefonía móvil, carteles publicitarios (o sus restos), muros caídos, etc. En fin un desmadejo general: una derrota que genera a la vista de cualquiera la más desagradable sensación de sálvase quien pueda, de insensibilidad y de desbarajuste. (54-55)

This passage sketches out the chaotic interstitial space of “sprawlscape,” the consequence of a limitless urban expansion. This surface level legibility, in contrast to the above-mentioned textual and corporeal renderings in Garrotxa, cannot be captured by a single viewpoint. Indeed, there is no single narrative to incapsulate its purpose nor an explicit reason for living in such a space (save necessity).

This description also hints at the darker qualities inherent in hybrid landscapes. Indeed, this is a terrain that remains largely invisible to our traditional attempts to capture, frame and identify with a landscape. *It* evades meaning. Nogué suggests that,

while its discourse is not immanent in our visible spectrum, we might be able to dissect what lies beneath the invisible:

El hecho de que la realidad está constituida por presencias y ausencias al mismo tiempo, por unos elementos que se manifiestan y otros que se esconden, pero que al fin y al cabo siguen estando presentes. O dicho en otra forma la realidad no es solamente lo que se ve. Lo visible no se puede identificar con lo real y al revés.  
(55-56)

The rift between the visible and the real points to a crisis of representation: our cultural identification with landscapes no longer coincides with the state of the world around us, locally or globally (58).

Nogué concludes this essay with the proposal of three possible solutions to the problem of hybridity. The first is an attitude he aptly describes as *laissez faire*: acknowledge the rupture between our landscape imaginary and the crumbling terrains it represents. The second proposal is a flat-out rejection of landscape archetypes: viz. triad of nature-culture-region as elaborated above. Finally, Nogué identifies the prospects of *una intervención pensada y participada*, revising the historical taxonomies of landscapes in accordance with the shifting terrains. The final option seems most viable:

Algún nuevo tipo de paisaje tiene que poder ser objeto de representación social si queremos resolver esta fractura, actualmente en plena vigencia, entre el paisaje real y el paisaje representado. (58)

Indeed, Nogué asserts that this is precisely the mission of the *Observatori* in its attempts to apply the objectives of the European Convention on Landscapes. Insofar as education and research about landscapes encourage greater awareness of how surroundings affect

our wellbeing and how our actions affect our surroundings, it is conceivable that this could begin to solve the crisis of representation, as elaborated here.

While research and education certainly address awareness about the conservation of landscapes, they do not approach the question of how to renew (or reject) an antiquated visual language, predicated on the limiting triad of nature-culture-region. It is at this crux that the intervention of experimental landscapes becomes particularly productive. Artists Sabadell and Perejaume also critique the traditional visual spectrum and scale of landscapes in order to generate new representations of an ecologically aware culture. But what exactly is it about artistic experimentation that uniquely offers a solution to a larger socio-ecological problem? As I have mentioned, art objects allow us different ways of moving beyond the rift between the representation and the represented because art can generate new visual codes more in line with the state of contemporary landscapes. While the nature-culture-region is predicated on a notion of place, Sabadell and Perejaume work through a more inclusive conceptual triad of eco-techno-symbolic networks, consisting of compositions of women and men, animals and plants, machines and languages. In my view, two methods of carrying out this experiment are challenging spatial and temporal re-arrangements because both work to incorporate external stimuli and challenge our own sensual perception. In what follows, I examine two cases of experimental landscapes that spatially re-arrange the scale of human daily experience and slow down our experience of time.

## 2c. Antipaisajismo: Lluís Sabadell Artiga

Lluís Sabadell Artiga (1974) is an artist, performer, and designer residing in Girona, Catalonia. His art is not only exemplary of environmentally committed cultural

production, but also of new challenging forays into experimental thinking about landscape esthetics, culture and the environment. He has also created new networks and organizations that encourage artistic production about environmental issues.<sup>36</sup>

Along with artists Nico Baumgarten, Clara Boj, Diego Díaz and Alfonso Borragán, Sabadell gave an exposition in Girona that speaks directly to the question of landscape, entitled “Paisatge?” (2010). Displayed in the gallery space of *Centre d’Art Contemporani* in Girona, his portion of the work is starkly introduced with an arrangement of shadow and light projected onto the wall: an oval spotlight centered around black text answering to the exhibition’s title: “El paisatge no existeix” (fig. 1). Proceeding through the gallery space, one confronts a series of moving and static images, each showing humans interacting with a specific environment. There is, for instance, a moving image projected onto the gallery floor of butterflies hovering over an arrangement of cow manure; a temporal sequence of photographs showing a small group of people building a raft on a beachfront; and a rather large basket woven from tree branches next to sequenced photographs revealing the weaving process.



Fig. 1

Each of these works suggestively emphasizes process over static images, and interaction over isolated contemplation of nature. These images show humans in proximity with a particular environment carrying out an action. Furthermore, spectators are not kept at a distance from the images but interact with some of the projects as they move about the exhibition. Such engagement offers a different conception of landscape, which is simultaneously a critique and a gesture at a new alternative. In terms of critique, the introductory spotlight projection serves as a stand-in for the visual representation of landscape, revealing that nothing is there but a hollowed-out signifier. Entering the gallery space, the viewer crosses through and interferes with the projection, insinuating that a landscape has more to do with humans than it does with nature, more to do with –scapes than with land. Landscape images, whether painted, filmed or photographed, represent a bad faith ecology based purely on estheticism, or what Sabadell refers to as “visualism,” or an artistic creation that fetishizes an environment based solely on the human view of that space. Landscapes reduced by visualism fail to account for biodiversity as well as the photographic diversity outside of the spotlight. The following text appeared next to the projected “El paisatge no existeix:”

El paisatge no existeix és una instal·lació que consisteix en la projecció de l'ombra d'aquest text sobre la paret. El focus està col·locat de manera que quan els visitants accedeixen a la sala interfereixen en la projecció fent que el text desaparegui en la seva presència.

The projected text involves the exposition's visitors with the images because they interfere with the space between the source and image. The projected visual is only the shadow of another text that remains invisible to the viewer, placing distance between the



signifier (the projection) and the signified (the projected). Such an image, then, questions the notion that an artistic rendering represents the land. Indeed, the spectators' view, in this case, makes the projected landscape disappear. Instead of remaining locked outside of the landscape by the actual frames of painting within the insulated space of a gallery, we are challenged to consider our own place within the landscape. Such a challenge attempts to reconnect human actions with the natural world. Put differently, the viewer of Sabadell's work becomes entangled in the ecological, technological and symbol systems at play in each photograph or projected image.

Discussed below the label “antipaisajismo,” one should expect Sabadell to fit into Nogué's second remedy for the crisis of landscape representation: art and culture need to thoroughly do away with landscape esthetics. His critique, however, is not exactly a rejection. The *anti-* does not entirely reject the medium, but rather critiques its inability to represent the scope and scale of the ecological and cultural changes. Sabadell assures us that landscapes are certainly venomous, but, as such, they also contain an antidote to the problem. His concern lies with the esthetic triad enumerated by Nogué. Nature-culture-region is neither capable of grasping the scale of ecological issues nor does it encourage greater awareness of our environment because it does not think along the lines of inclusivity. Artistic experimentation pushes for a different triad of relations between ecology, technology and symbolism because it pulls apart the different actants involved in the construction of a landscape (*eco-tecno-simbòlic*) (Sabadell “Limits” 7). A survey of Sabadell's theoretical and artistic projects exemplifies how to renovate the language of experimental landscapes, with particular regards to the harm caused by a seemingly benign art form. In what follows, I will contrast Sabadell's position to the nature-culture-

region triad and argue that his experimental landscapes begin to let go of the visual art as means to come into closer contact with nonhuman beings. The negation of landscape esthetics can be read as a sacrifice of the visual, giving up some of the prevalent features of the medium for different kinds of contact with the nonhuman world. I will draw out the stakes of *antipaisajismo*, reading it alongside Georges Bataille, among others, allowing for a historical and theoretical understanding of Sabadell's work.

Sabadell's recent "Manifest contra el paisatge" (2010) is a short pamphlet that operates, as many manifestos do, by proclaiming a new kind of art through the negation of an older tradition. However, Sabadell is not simply after experimentation for the sake of experimentation and instead invests in *imagining* artistically what we are beginning to understand about the larger ecosystems that sustain us. Landscape, as a medium and a genre, fails to get at the core of ecological issues because it relegates its viewers to mere "spectatorship" of an environment, unable to think beyond the shimmering, visible surface of what appears to the human eye. Put differently, "spectatorship" compresses and simplifies a wide range of complex phenomena to one perceptive mode: the eye. This esthetics, in turn, fails to account for the rich ecological diversity of an environment. The manifesto begins with a figurative denunciation of this simplification: "El paisatge és un llop amb pell de xai" (5). Sabadell calls attention to the superficially idyllic quality inherent in landscape esthetics, which, though potentially pleasing, is ultimately escapist and detached from any quality that highlights ecological or ideological relationships between the viewer and the scenery. Indeed, its luring tranquility kills like a wolf:

El paisatge mata perquè és reduccionista, simplificador, descontextualitzador, esteticista; per tot això, el paisatge mata la natura, el món i amb ell, irremissiblement, ens mata a nosaltres. (6)

*Paisajismo* esthetically operates at the ecological expense of the world, including its human spectators. But how does landscape help destroy nature, the world and mankind? A landscape painting is static, “a fossilization” of fluxes and meshes (21). In a position similar to Nogué’s critique of landscape representation, Sabadell attributes one side of the ecological crisis to a problem of esthetics: our current enjoyment of nature does nothing to show how we are connected to these inner workings. Instead, landscape painting is “reductionist,” “simplifying” and “decontextualizing” because it is entirely focused on the shimmering qualities of nature available to the human eye, without regard for larger, often invisible, processes at work in an ecosystem. That is to say, landscape painting as a fetishized, frozen visual medium is out of sync with ecological processes. Thinking back to Nogué’s definition that landscape is a historically specific interaction between nature and culture, Sabadell contends that landscape has become all too human. However, this lack of commitment to the natural world is also a lack of commitment to the world at large and consequently to humans themselves. But the phrase “lack of commitment” suggests a kind of tacit acceptance of the status quo, whereas Sabadell argues that “landscape values” actively threaten life:

Els valors paisatgístics amenacen la vida. Entendre només la dimensió visual de la natura conduirà a la seva irremissible mort. Tancar la vida, posar fronteres entre espais naturals profundament i ecològicament connectats només contribueix a la seva destrucció. El paisatge remet directament a la cultura del visualisme. (Ibid)

This passage underscores the impeding function of the frame: landscapes inevitably divide where we should see connections. “Visualism,” according to Sabadell, is symptomatic of what Nogué interprets as the gap between the representation and the real. And this is no simple statement, as Sabadell is almost predominantly a visual artist. For him, the image should push beyond what is in the frame, on the canvas or on the page to urge us to understand “other types of relations” such as biological or emotional relationships. Without consideration of these other relations, landscapes solely indicate an ego-system: an anthropocentric vision of natural surroundings. He considers these to be interconnected technological, symbolic and ecological networks (*ecosistémicas*). In order to approach this mesh of connections, experimental landscapes must sacrifice visualism and look to other spatial and temporal points of contact.

The manifesto not only proclaims that landscapes are symptomatic of the *ego*-system but the text also visually explores the implications. In contrast to an eco-system, the ego-system serves as the ideological backdrop for the esthetics of landscapes. Consider Figure 2’s play with the words “El Pais-atge.” The text consists only of black text on the white backdrop of the pages. But Sabadell graphically plays with the words of his argument, creating a series of text-images. The large block letters *EL, PAIS-, ATGE* textually demarcate the place of a landscape, whose visual frame supposedly represents nature. Between *PAIS-* and *ATGE* appear the words “quan en realitat estem dins,” creating what one might describe as “a text-image” (10). On the opposing page, “ens deixa fora” locates the position of the viewer, remaining locked outside of the painting’s frame. Landscape’s reification of place, certainly an instance of nature-culture-region, creates an artificial divide between the land observed and the human observer. This text-

image structure repeats this practice four times, enumerating four implications of landscape art, eventually leading to the contention that “el paisatge ens abandona” (14-15). Sabadell concludes this section of the manifesto arguing that we should, in effect, abandon purely visual landscapes as the dominant means of expressing our interactions with nature (fig. 3).



Fig. 2

This critique of landscape leads Sabadell to spell out three implications of what he refers to as the subsequent “threats” of the “landscape-wolf.” First, the understanding and experience of natural landscapes are decaying as we calmly contemplate various images of rivers, roads and mountains. Sabadell refers to these latter figures as landscape pornography; though we are drawn into an idyllic environment, it is in fact the product of an imaginary perversion. Because of the lack of a language to approach the decaying

world, we become even more “decontextualized” or “delocalized” from nature. Second, urban landscapes are becoming less accessible to their inhabitants. As Harvey pointed out earlier, public space is becoming privatized; architecture is becoming a protective barrier between who belongs and who does not, to the point that cities are designed “as plans without citizens.”<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, internal, emotional landscapes have also become fossilized, limiting the human capacity to *act* in accordance with the environment. Each of these consequences is tied to esthetic distancing and simplification that fails to account for the complex relationship between humans and environments.

These threats constitute a three-fold exclusionary frame leading to what he refers to as the *egosystem*, a worldview predicated on “anthropocentrism, egoism and abstract authority” (18). Indeed, the cult of visualism is implicitly dedicated to the sustenance of the ego. But this sustenance is ultimately shortsighted. Bad faith nature loving carried out through a landscape is like Plato’s deceiving images inscribed allegorically on the walls of the cave. Meanwhile outside the cave, *paisajismo* threatens to kill off what remains of the natural, urban and social landscapes it supposedly represents. Visualism, as the dominant order, leads us to a moment of extreme decadency and cultural sickness.<sup>38</sup> It is worth hashing out the theoretical implications of three-fold exclusionary tactic, following his three qualities: “abstract authority, egoism and anthropocentrism.”



Fig. 3

First, there is the abstract authority inherent in the placement of a landscape piece. A landscape painting is usually found in an art gallery, showroom, museum or above the hearth of a home. But an art object is rarely placed within nature itself.<sup>39</sup> This claim is tied to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), which critiques the role of the avant-garde as a potentially liberational project. Bürger argues that the avant-garde ultimately fails to subvert the established art world. Autonomy, as the central mode of bourgeois art, is the separation of art from daily living, allowing the individual artist an autonomous space to create. Reception also occurs in a space distanced from the praxis of life.<sup>40</sup> The historical avant-garde wished to reconnect to life biologically and socially through an exposure of artistic labor. Bürger argues that the persistence of autonomy within some manifestations of avant-garde art constitutes "a false sublation" because it continues to operate in the same division of spheres between life and art: in museums, galleries and, more generally, divorced from nature. If, on a theoretical level, the historical avant-garde asserts that art should fuse again with the praxis of daily life, then the reception of an artwork must also operate without the constraints of bourgeois art.

Indeed, as he puts it: “Art as an institution neutralizes the political content of the individual work” (90). But Sabadell precisely wants to place the artwork in touch with ecosystems. Consider, for instance, the process art from *Paisatge?*, such as the building of the basket out of tree branches or the raft out of beach driftwood (fig. 4). Viewers are not simply provided with an abstracted, distanced perception of the artist, but rather bear witness to human interaction with a particular environment. The praxis of art, then, returns to quotidian encounters between the ecological (tree branches), the technological (the labor of basket-making) and the symbolic (the process photography itself). It is true, however, that these photographs are still presented to the viewer in a gallery space. Yet just as the projected text “El paisatge no existeix” shows disparity between the projected visual and the text, Sabadell’s images are merely fragments of the actual art object, in this case the elements that composed the raft, which was always intended as some other action in an outdoor space. The visual imaginary for an abstract ego, then, begins to dwindle into the growing importance of artistically emphasizing our entanglement with the eco-techno-symbolic network.



Fig. 4



The second term, “egoism,” diagnoses the process typically used to privilege the landscapes’s figure, i.e. its focal point, and the background. This is tied to the actual concrete frame of a landscape painting. In *Ecology without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton develops what he describes as ambient poetics, tools for analyzing the environmentality of artworks across different mediums. Pivotal to his hermeneutics is Derrida’s use of the word re-mark. Following Derrida in *Dissemination* (1983) and *The Truth in Painting* (1987), writing and painting impose esthetic boundary lines between what is a significant mark (what we pay attention to in the foreground) and what does not demand our attention (the background). The re-mark is an analytic question: how *much* or how *little* does the work distinguish between its background and foreground, between what is inside and outside of a frame? For example, the physical frame of a painting encapsulates a particular subject matter while excluding another. (Sabadell’s projected text and spotlight also point out the power of a frame.) For Sabadell, landscape art often succumbs to the egoist enjoyment of nature while ignoring the destruction of actual ecosystems. An artist focuses on a verdant valley while ignoring a power plant next door. Another might paint the power plant as a denunciatory act against the plant’s pollution. A third might juxtapose the two images and put them in communication. Sabadell’s manifesto points out that the final example is the least simplistic because it places the two –scapes in dialogue: the pristine and the polluted are connected. In the *Paisatge?* Exhibition, Sabadell addresses this issue directly with four images of the same landscape with four different focal points (Fig. 5). An oval image appears shifted in each image, while the background is blacked-out in different areas. This shift underscores the arbitrary relationship between the figure and the ground of an image while

simultaneously blurring the lines between what is re-markable and what is left out.

Considered as a temporal sequence, then, the images pay homage to environmental areas potentially ignored or left out of landscape representation. These photographs question the landscape's re-mark: the very boundary lines between the figure and the ground.



Fig. 5

Finally, Sabadell's work raises important questions about the anthropocentric tendency of landscape esthetics. Visualism privileges a purely human-focused artwork, almost entirely void of the connections between humans and nonhumans. Martin Jay's work in the 1980s and 1990s sought to trace various critical genealogies of "ocularcentrism" in western philosophy and esthetics. For Jay, the dominant "visual regime" coffered a specific ordering of things that privileges "scientific" representations without taking account other approaches to objects. In one essay on the historical avant-garde's experimentation with the visual, Jay analyzes the importance of the avant-garde art in the thought of Georges Bataille, who always maintained an important if

tendentious relationship with the movement. Jay argues that:

[Bataille's] eye is toppled from its privileged place in the sensual hierarchy to be linked instead with objects and functions more normally associated with "baser" human behavior. (18)

Jay derives Bataille's particular denigration of vision to his experiences in the dirty, polluted environment of trench warfare of World War I.<sup>41</sup> Visualism fails to artistically express the despair after such an experience or more generally express the state of such an environment.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, surrealism, anthropology, and Hegelianism routinely informed Bataille's thought.<sup>43</sup> Such a move, Jay argues, does not completely reject the importance of vision in art but questions the capacity of the visual to deliver a meaningful message about the critical state of affairs. Yet Bataille himself does not do away with the importance of the eye but transforms it into "the ignoble eye" (Ibid).<sup>44</sup> If the trenches of World War I and II destroyed the idyllic landscapes of Europe in the early twentieth century, then one can analogously state the same about today's ecological crisis. Instead of pristine landscapes seen from afar, Sabadell's *antipaisajismo* follows suite and denigrates vision and asserts that the antidote is found in more intimate encounters with ecosystems.

What are these "more intimate encounters" in the realm of the experimental landscapes? The connection between Sabadell's *antipaisajismo* and Bataille's particular writing on sacrifice can be pushed further as means of extrapolation. Alan Stoekl has recently drawn attention to Bataille's thought as a contribution to what a "post-sustainable" society will become.<sup>45</sup> Thinking against our contemporary mantra of sustainability, that energy consumption should be conserved or even severely limited,

Bataille does not consider energy consumption itself as the problem; instead, it is expenditure in bad faith vis-à-vis the economic principle of utility, regardless of any ethical safety valve. This observation is an application of Bataille's distinction between a restricted and general economy ("The Notion"). While the former term alludes to our contemporary system established on useful exchange, Bataille's general economy is based on the Marcel Mauss's ethnographic term "potlatch," a gift or sacrifice without the expectation of return.<sup>46</sup> In terms of Sabadell's critique, a limited economy based on utility and return (or profit), is indicative an egoism that fails to account for the consequences of energy expenditure. In other words, this limited economy is solely based on shortsighted anthropocentric interest. A general economy considers energy expenditure in the larger framework of eco-techno-symbolic networks; that is to say, expenditure is judged in terms of community, not ego. Our current energy regime of petroleum, justified entirely by "pragmatic concerns," is certainly emblematic of a restricted economy. But, for Stoeckl, the petro-regime also contains the seeds of its own demise: the sheer fact that oil deposits are finite and, sooner rather than later, will disappear. Peak oil as the limit-case for this regime, then, points to future forms of energy expenditure:

One limit to energy, based in a fundamental scarcity, entails another burn-off, another non-knowledge of excess, another mode of ecstatic or dreadful transport, in short, another, this time, cursed energy. (185)

There is a key difference between the capitalist consolidation of resources and production and the general energy expenditure Bataille has in mind. The latter is much more in tune with the self-mutilations of the mad artist than it is with the global baron capitalist's *wanton use* of energy. In other words, Bataille's general economy seems to advocate for a

*creative* re-thinking of energy use as we consider the wider implications of use of petroleum. The term “post-sustainability” does not point to a society no longer needing to conserve energy, but rather a society that has moved beyond a “restricted” economy that preaches the existential practicality of burning fossil fuels while issuing imperatives of frugality.

Exporting Bataille’s general theory of economic expenditure into art leads us to the notion of sacrifice, as seen in *antipaisajismo*. Bataille describes a sacrifice as an expenditure of energy and “loss of self” into a particular project (66). In *Theory of Religion* (1973), Bataille compares the act of sacrifice to the “plane of imminence” normally maintained by animals.<sup>47</sup> The sacrificer, surrendering something useful, transcends “the realm of things” and participates in a larger expenditure of energy, much like the artist struggling with his ideal vision. Put differently, sacrifice leads away from utility and toward intimacy, “in the trembling of the individual... [the] holy, sacred, and suffused with anguish” (52). Bataille relates the sacrifice to artistic creation in “The Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,” which begins with the details of Gaston F., a 30-year old who automutilated himself after staring at the sun for some time. Bataille summarizes the existent accounts of why the event may have occurred: the young man was a painter perhaps swayed by alcohol and a biography of Vincent Van Gogh, who infamously cut off his ear and sent it to a prostitute. For Bataille, these examples indicate that most modern or contemporary examples of sacrifice appear to be acts of insanity, relegated to the edges of society.

[I]n our day, with the custom of sacrifice in full decline, the meaning of the word, to the extent that it implies a drive revealed by an *inner experience*, is still as

closely linked as possible to the notion of a *spirit of sacrifice*, of which the automutilation of madmen is only the most absurd and terrible example. (67)

The term inner experience refers to the artist's encounter with an ideal expression of his art.<sup>48</sup> The self-mutilation, as the result of an encounter with an artistic ideal, approaches a sinister attempt to once again become in touch with energies that are beyond the scope of utility.

Considering *antipaisajismo*, Bataille's suggestion is that getting rid of strict economic and artistic regimes provides a larger picture of *the oikos*: the grid of eco-techno-symbolic relations. Sabadell urges for such a sacrifice of art's visual fetish. While it is not the case that we need to lose our vision to truly see, visualism needs to be abandoned to "see the forest through the trees." That is to say, abstract authority, egoism, and anthropocentrism must be sacrificed to gain larger spatial images of ecological systems. The visual regime of landscape painting, now in crisis alongside our petroleum-based economy, is a limited economy of vision, encapsulating ecology in a system of "egoism, abstract authority and anthropocentrism." Figuratively speaking, then, what is needed is a sacrifice of the visual to approach an intimate, experimental landscape. In other words, the figure of the suffering artist is tapping into expenditures outside the scope of a restricted economy. In Sabadell's work, for instance, artistic creativity more closely aligned with the energies of particular ecosystems, such as clearing away a stalled creek bed or spontaneously capturing the energy exchange between butterflies and cow manure. I see this gesture at a larger energy forces as similar to Sabadell's nature after we have turned away from purely visual estheticism. For

Sabadell, the myopic landscape view of nature must be scrapped in order to access a larger picture of “Gaia.”

What is the result of this critique? On the face of it, it would seem that Sabadell is advocating for a complete abdication of landscape and our experience of it, Nogué’s second remedy for the crisis of landscape esthetics. However, Sabadell ends his manifesto with a different conclusion that is in line with Nogué’s own position.

La part bona és que la mateixa malaltia és el seu propi antídote (morim de paisatge, ja que morim d’ell i amb ell), però el sobreviurem, ja que és ell precisament el que ens mostra la seva pròpia podridura. (30)

The degeneration of landscapes is not a complete rejection of the artistic niche it seems to represent. Instead, it dismisses the aforementioned foundational triad of nature-culture-region as too naïve and ultimately decadent. *Antipaisajismo* offers an *antitode*. This response is similar to the ecological resonances in Chilean poet Nicanor Parra’s *antipoesía*. Speaking to critic Iván Carrasco, Parra reflects that social poetry is already inherently ecological: “De la humanidad, y además de la humanidad, también están las demás especies, hay que sumar las demás especies” (73). Parra argues that if social poetry is truly concerned with “una vida lúdica, creativa, igualitaria y pluralista” then it must ultimately speak not only of humanity but also of the other nonhuman beings. Similar to Riechmann’s critique of *poesía pura* as discussed in chapter one, *antipoesía* works to bring out this ecological aspect of poetry. In turn, *antipoesía* pushes for *autoregulación* of human activity. Self-regulation, as the term suggests, calls for greater attention to ecological and social limitations, so that no human project is considered without potential ecological fallout. Consequently, energy expenditure, though not

surpressed, is carried out ethically in relationship to the human and nonhuman communities it impacts.

The same is true for *antipaisajismo*. Insofar as art works against the decontextualizing, reductionist, and simplyfying agents in landscape esthetics, it contextualizes, broadens and complicates art's relation to the environment. In the visual medium, Sabadell argues for a reformulation of visual codes that reflect the state of landscapes. These visual codes compose eco-techno-symbolic meshes that engage ecological connection.

Thinking back to Nogué's observation that landscapes are the most fundamental way in which humans identify with their environments, what happens when landscape esthetics can no longer speak of the terrains they represent? For Sabadell, this is precisely the effect of landscape esthetics because it becomes a decontextualizing act, removing the esthetic from the causal. After letting go or sacrificing visualism, artistic expression is less bound to the status of the static observer and able to engage more fully with a particular environment. As suggested above, eco-techno-symbolic networks are compositions of biologically and culturally diverse beings, ones ultimately connected together as they create communities. To provide an example of one such action, I turn to Catalan artist Perejaume and his recent project *Tres dibujos de Madrid*.

#### 2d. Art as Ecological Action: Perejaume

Catalan artist Perejaume (1957), often pegged as a landscape artist, has tirelessly experimented with visual and written mediums through what he describes as "actions" (*Tres dibujos* 38-39). This experimentation has led him to a conclusion similar to Sabadell's, the word "landscape," if not used critically, is too semantically loose.<sup>49</sup>



Furthermore, he has consistently argued that modernity's "progress," in spite of making us more connected with the world than ever before, has destroyed humanity's relationship with the natural environment. This position is a third articulation of the crisis of landscape esthetic because it gestures at how we have lost the language to represent our environment. As a response, his work crosses different media, sites and venues but ultimately critiques how humans perceive and contemplate landscapes, arguing for more intimate encounters with nature. Perejaume also maintains scholarly interest in landscape painting of the eighteenth century (though his own work could hardly be labeled simply as an homage to an earlier epoch). Instead of leaving landscape mired in an anthropocentric vision, Perejaume's work has consistently drawn attention to the power of environments and objects, which seem to return the gaze of the engineer, the backpacker or the writer. In this way, his work reacts to landscape paintings and poems, leading us to an experimental landscape in which networks of human and nonhuman, life and nonlife all have a role in the outcome of the action.

We can provisionally define the action as a consideration of an artwork within its surrounding environment, what Perejaume describes as "un eje de fuerzas," including the elements, activities and, finally the aftereffects of a work (*Tres dibujos* 39). Perejaume is as interested in the perspective of a tree as he is in human participation in the action. The action, then, is not only in diametric opposition to the Romantic notion of the individual creation, but it also "undoes" language suggestive of the individual human creator.

Actions are about co-creation, artwork coming into being through the common meeting point of various nonhuman and human forces. Consequently, the niche of landscape esthetics becomes the center of attention, as viewers speculate about the efficacy of the

genre and its potential ecological fallout. In what follows, I will elucidate some salient features of the action following the example of *Tres dibujos de Madrid* (2007), surveying some of the major actants in the project.

In 2004, the Faculty of Fine Arts at the *Universidad Complutense* in Madrid asked Perejaume if he would give an exposition of his work at the university. His response was simply: “I’ll think about it.” Three years later, he calls back with the idea of *Tres dibujos*. The project proposed to select three drawings from the archives of the university library and walk them out of the city. Though pedestrians can theoretically leave the city from *Príncipe Píos* and embark on the *Senda Real* northwest, towards the source of the Manzanares River, recent construction on the M-30 highway had made this impossible. Architect Fernando Porras-Isla charted what he saw as the only potential route out of the city, following the Manzanares south towards its confluence with the River Jarama. Walking, then, becomes the unifying point of the action, connecting the city, its inhabitants, the university, and the paintings with the larger environment of the Autonomous Community of Madrid.

*Tres dibujos de Madrid* is not a text or a solidified piece of art, but an attempt to bring into contact art, human bodies and the urban environment of Madrid. (Perejaume, for instance, opted not to document their trajectory out of the city with photographic or video footage.)<sup>50</sup> It occurred in Madrid on the 22nd and 23rd of March in 2007, coinciding with construction that buried parts of M-30 (a major highway encircling the city) under the River Manzanares. The book entitled *Tres dibujos de Madrid* is a recapitulation of reflection pieces provided by some of the participants. As an object lying in the aftermath of the action itself, the text considers what *Tres dibujos* might

entail on a larger front concerning the structural and esthetic divorce between contemporary cities and their surroundings.<sup>51</sup>

Perejaume's peripatetic idea is in fact related to some of Madrid's many grassroots movements. Beginning in the mid-1990s, these groups have advocated for the maintenance of walking and bicycle paths across the region in the face of their disappearance in the wake of expanding highway systems from kilometer marker zero. In 1998, for example, *la Coordinadora Salvemos la Dehesa de la Villa*, organized the European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW), not only to reflect on the future of the park but also to consider pedestrian access to the green space from other local spaces (such as Monte de El Pardo and Casa de Campo). The workshop concluded with the proposal for an "ecological route" connecting these spaces. This idea points to a reality captured by Riechmann's "ciudad-bosque" from chapter one: these green spaces are ultimately natural-urban spaces and must remain intricately connected to urban systems if cities are to become more ecologically feasible ("urbano natural"). Prior to the mid-1990s, the route existed as the *Senda Real*, the most feasible way to leave Madrid on foot (Image 2.6). The problem is that the path and the parks themselves have become increasingly isolated in more resonant projects of infrastructure and real estate development. Groups such as *Asociación de Viadantes a Pie* and the *Coordinadora* both argue that maintaining ecological spaces that are well connected for pedestrians insures that they are well integrated into the community.

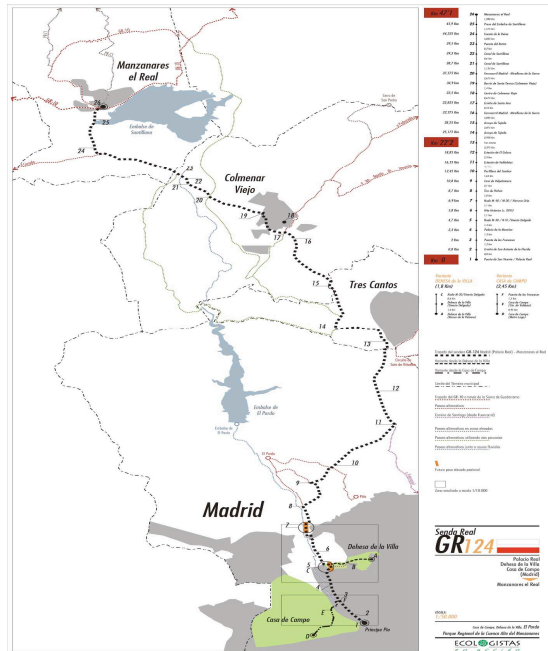


Fig. 6

Other related ecological concerns have been raised about the river Manzanares itself, specifically around the city of Madrid. In July 2012, *El País* reported that large portions of the river in and near urban areas developed large patches of algae, which seemed to choke off other animal and plant life and potentially create risks for human populations. According to *La Confederación Hidrográfica del Tajo*, algae are a natural cycle of the river and cause no dangers. But Alberto Fernández of WWF/España has challenged this hypothesis, arguing that the algae buildup is in fact an agglutination of dead plant matter. The “artificialization” of the river around Madrid has converted the Manzanares into a canal and, in turn, severely limited the oxygen levels in the water through the process of eutrophication.<sup>52</sup>

Though he was writing before the algae dilemma, architect Fernando de Porras-Isla entitled his contribution to the *Tres dibujos* text “M versus M,” alluding to the ecological antagonism between the Manzanares and the M-30 road. Porras-Isla provides

the important insight that, though the Manzanares is a small river eventually flowing into the river Jarama, its waters run through the entire gambit of European climates, from the cold Nordic-like sierra de Guadarrama to the desert of Almería. Of course, as Porras also notes, there are urban conditions as well, which have greatly expanded geographically and ecologically throughout the twentieth century.

La ciudad desbordó sus fronteras al otro lado del río. Alcanzó las aldeas cercanas y las absorbió en sus límites, pasando de puntillas sobre el Manzanares, segregando una franja de nadie, insalubre y húmeda.... Los automóviles ocultaron el río a su paso por la ciudad a partir de la década de los setenta. El Manzanares no era entonces sino un punto negro donde convergían las espaldas de las dos mitades de Madrid, y su utilidad mayor la de recoger las aguas sucias sobrantes de las depuradoras y del sistema de alcantarillado, sobre todo en los días de tormenta.

(25)

M-30, then, became a symbol of urban expansion and the consequent erasure of Madrid's natural topography. To use Bataille's word again, regional ecology is sacrificed in the name of global connectivity. Manzanares becomes invisible to the drivers on highways and remains only as a hidden means to remove waste water from the city. Perejaume's intention to leave the city on foot, then, responds to a particular socio-ecological context: how do we, as inhabitants of an increasingly isolated urban environment, regain contact with an erased natural geography?

There were seven human participants involved in the action: the artist, Perejaume, art critic Carles Guerra, professor of Fine Arts Tonia Raquejo, Marcos Montes, from the association "Madrid a pie," artist Luis Ortega, architect Fernando Porras Isla and

“security personnel.” In his own essay in *Tres dibujos* Perejaume lists the heterogeneous elements involved in the “eje de fuerzas”:

1. The city of Madrid
2. Leaving the city on foot
3. The Academy
4. The works from the eighteenth century, brought to life in Madrid
5. The act of walking

In what follows, I will focus on the drawings, the city and the act and art of walking in order to re-trace the important steps taken to reconnect Madrid’s urban environment to its increasingly invisible natural topography.

Three anatomical drawings were selected from the archives of la Biblioteca de la Facultad de Bellas Artes and carried to the outskirts of the city on foot. What is the importance of the drawings in this action? In my view, it should be understood as an act of re-animation of artwork left dormant in the archives. One should note that each of the drawings is an anatomical study of the human leg or foot. The first two paintings are anonymous, simply entitled “Estudio de una pierna,” drawn with red chalk (sanguine) and the second “Pie visto de frente,” drawn with charcoal. The third drawing, “Pie izquierdo visto en escorzo lateral” is attributed to the Valencian late Baroque and early neoclassicist painter José Vergara Jimeno (1762-1799). These paintings share a few commonalities. First, all of these works date from the common period of the eighteenth century, a moment of major economic expansion into the “natural” sphere and, ironically, a moment of proliferation in landscape painting. Second, their common subject matter, human anatomy, was clearly a motive for their selection in the action. As artistic renderings of the human body, these images study and animate the structure of physical movement. Finally, as sketches, they are not notable as major works of art in themselves,

but merely serve as a kind of painterly essay for future work. These essays, after serving their initial purpose as a study were simply left on file to slowly fade away in the archives.<sup>53</sup> Perejaume's move to "re-animate" these particular images is to put them back into contact with human society itself, most specifically with the machinery of Madrid's completely urbanized zone, to mobilize them or, put differently, to give them "feet."

What does the phrase "completely urbanized zone" mean? Such a question points us to the city as another element of the action. According to *Tres dibujos*, it implies that the city has taken the medieval phenomenon of walling in the city to new extremes. Just as cities of long ago constructed walls to protect against the barbarians on the outside, the urban mentality has now sealed in its citizens into a completely artificial, insulated existence. Simply put, the city is a bubble, shielded from many points of contact with its own niche that prohibits departure on foot. Perejaume speculates:

Resulta sorprendente que una población de cerca de cuatro millones de habitantes haya aceptado la mutilación que supone no poder escaparse por sus propios medios del recinto donde habitan, que, a cambio del gregarismo, hayan tolerado la invalidez de depender de uno u otro vehículo mecánico para salir de ella. La imagen de cuatro millones de mamíferos cercados por las rondas, desatentos a que casi no es posible escaparse a pie de ella, es ciertamente extraña. (41)

Perejaume goes on to say that, though he does not want to underscore a hypothetical panicked mass departure from the city, there is a certain absurdity in these new walls. If the purpose of Madrid's radial roads is to connect the center to the provinces, then it has antithetically built a new system of walls in this process. But these walls are no longer simply built from brick and mortar. Instead they are constructed of ventilation shafts,

tubes, metros and automobile fairways, “nuevo cerco de murallas son las puertas aeroportuarias, telemáticas, ferroviarias y viales, por donde una ciudad se conecta con las otras” (41-42). While such structures are supposedly built with the concept of utility in mind, the end-result is a kind of urban or architectural envelope, sealing in the human away from the larger nonhuman environment.<sup>54</sup> In Madrid’s particular situation, the encircling highway M-30 allows for a steady stream of traffic from other cities and towns as well as from the Barajas airport but discourages any theoretical exit on foot. Without an automobile, the simplest way to move quickly around the city is through the metro, entering a series of artificially constructed and climate-controlled tubes. In this circumstance, everyday human ecology becomes so constructed it loses physical and mental touch with its actual overlapping nonhuman constituents, communing very little with actual peripheral paths away from the city.

Walking, the final element I will consider of Perejaume’s project, becomes the unifying element in the action. Walking, Perejaume explains, “es una acción completísima, compleja, sofisticada” (49). But the urban has fundamentally disconnected the human body from the actual act of following a *camino* (*camí*) and exiting a city on foot. Instead of coming into actual physical contact with an environment, current modes of exit are mediated by cars, trams and trains, to the point that this has become part of our everyday expectation. In contrast, the act and art of walking inspire actual, physical contact with the cityscape itself.

Caminar y escribir se parecen; la eficacia de la palabra para llegar a poner en contacto sustancias heterogéneas y la eficacia del paso son comparables. Ahora ya



no sé si es el texto el que ilustra el camino hecho o bien el camino hecho el que ilustra estas palabras. (59)

Instead of remaining locked in an insulated environment walking puts the human body in contact with its niche, to feel out its gravitational presence within the urbanized place of Madrid. In this way, the action is a kind of undoing of the thinking commonly presupposed in urban movement (within bubbles, envelopes and cars).

There are two aspects to this undoing, tied to space and time. Spatially speaking, the excursion, as a kind of action, becomes a way to explore unseen elements of a landscape. The group left the University and headed south along the Manzanares. Departing from the city on foot led to peripheral zones of urban decay, abandonment and danger.

Se hacía extraño acampar, con los dibujos patrimonializados, en aquellas yeseras algo herbosas, entre colinas de desmontes y eriales con toda clase de desechos.

Con las luces de Madrid en la línea del horizonte, en el aire apestoso de la depuradora sur del Manzanares, y a la luz de una hoguera donde ardían listones y marcos de puerta, el patrimonio era la vida entera. Todos los elementos del mundo compartíamos, con los dibujos, una comparable fragilidad. (53-55)

This limit area is in fact an ecotone between “the countryside” and “the city,” composed of rivers, water treatment facilities, factories and abandoned cars. This rapid change in settings, from the insulated visible side of the metropolis to its outskirts, illustrates the rupture between the terrain surrounding Madrid and the city itself. The peripheral limits of the city itself become a space to read into the epistemological and ontological divorce between human and nature. This divorce is further emphasized by the inclusion of the

drawings in the action. As products of the high academy, the paintings could not appear more alienated from the real state of peripheral urban landscapes. The esthetics of the action understands the thick admixture of elements present in this erased geography and calls our attention to it.

This leads us to the second aspect of the action: its temporal scale. The excursion as a form of movement and travel sets aside the question of utility at work in all of current preferred forms of transportation. Instead, it wants to slow down our movements, to ask us to really consider what is around us. Perejaume slows down the *scale* of our movements in order to consider our own presence with nonhumans as a significant force of gravity. Such an affect is similar to Rob Nixon's concept of slow time, which he argues is necessary to introduce into cultural production and environmentalist discourses in order to understand that ecological violence and destruction happen on much slower time scales than human dramas (Nixon). If the action is "un eje de fuerzas" of both human and nohuman varieties, slowing down our movements also allows us to pay greater attention to the various components and surroundings of the action. Walking with artworks, for instance, is certainly not the same as driving them across town or out of a city. The fact that each of the drawings is the study of a foot or leg further underscores walking as a sophisticated and slower interaction with a terrain. In contrast to leaving Madrid on a high speed train, for instance, walking out provides an ample unit of time to observe the status and impact of contemporary urban life.

## 2d. Conclusion: Artistic Interventions as a Solution

If, as Nogué and I have argued, landscape esthetics and local cultural identities are in a state of crisis, there seem to be two broad solutions to the issue. On the one hand,

there are political and pedagogical actions. The *Observatori*, for instance, advocates on behalf of landscapes and the cultural and the ecological patrimony they hold. This advocacy consists of environmental analysis, education on the history and significance of landscapes and political representation of these terrains on a variety of national and international levels.

The second solution is occurring through artistic experimentation on the visual language used to reflect our proximity to nature. Sabadell's critique of visualism or estheticism rejects the imaginary, pornographic ambience projected by traditional nature-worship. He argued that landscape esthetics are too limiting ecologically due to their authoritarian, egoist, and anthropological emphasis. Through the sacrifice of the visual, as suggested by Bataille's theory on the subject, art is better able to approach and convey more complex ecological relationships insofar as phenomena are not simplified to their visual qualities. His work, then, moves beyond the level of critique and also offers visual images, predominantly projections and photographs that emphasize process and action over stagnant observation. As a result, his art urges for greater contact with what he describes as eco-techno-symbolic networks of relations and what I ultimately extrapolated to mean communities of diverse human and nonhuman beings.

Perejaume's action is a critique of the urban system and opens up questions about how to re-imagine human interactions with the environment. Perejaume's action becomes a model for future esthetic interventions (or extensions) not in the sense that it should be copied, but rather because the action concretely placed art onto the streets and back into contact with an increasingly invisible natural topography around the city of Madrid. The result is a complex network of ecology (the natural environment of Madrid), technology

(built environments around the city) and symbols (the anatomical studies) placed into direct dialogue via the artistic intervention.

After all, environmental interactions, points of contact and overlaps do not always appear directly to the human eye or even to our analysis of that milieu. That is to say, if landscapes do in fact offer a way to come into contact with the environment, they need to imagine beyond the strict limitations of the human visual and poetic systems. If art's environmentality is to be open to ecological as well as to cultural difference, it needs to experiment and leave everyday experience, to help us imagine what it is we do not *see* in a landscape.

### **Chapter 3: Depth**

Tal vez por eso lo primero que reparó  
fue las cuerdas de los violines  
de la serie inconclusa de las *Naturalezas vivas*.  
-Manuel Rivas

Within surrealism the art object is but a window.  
-Jennifer Mundy

#### **3a. Introduction: Basque Ethnocentrism as Ecologocentrism**

It is possible to encapsulate Basque landscape painter Vicente Ameztoy's (1946-2001) project in one sentence: his painting entangles human beings with vegetables and other natural iconic images of the Basque Country. This seemingly bizarre move also has resonance in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Basque nationalism. One example comes from an anonymous text on the Battle of Mungía from the fifteenth century and impresses upon us what was at stake for the Basque nation:

Sobra tierra en Bizkaya para enterrar al invasor, y el Árbol de la Libertad no tiene  
más savia que la sangre de tus hijos. (Qtd. in Elorza, *Tras la huella* 98)

These verses conjure up several sentiments commonly associated with twentieth-century Basque nationalism. The poet evokes the image of the Tree of Freedom, often represented by the *Árbol de Guernica*, an image currently utilized in swearing in the president (*lehendakari*) of the Basque parliament.<sup>55</sup> While the tree is meant to symbolically represent the ties to homeland, the lines from Mungía go further and meditate on the “transubstantiation” of blood into sap, of human into vegetable. Such a poetic gesture suggests an intertwining between human progeny with iconic natural symbols of Basque ruralism. There is a clear evocation of the outside invader, whose presence threatens Bizkaya, meant here as a provocation of a mythical Basque homeland.

This presence contaminates the purity of the Basque terrain: an environment that, according to this imaginary, should only contain certain kinds of people, trees and animals, creating an ecology predicated on ethnocentrism and speciesism: a combination we will later classify as ecogocentrism.<sup>56</sup> While ethnocentrism excludes those who do not share a particular ethnicity, speciesism privileges particular species often based on their supposed origin in a particular area. In the case of Basque landscape painting, artists prescribe a certain essence to Basque lands, rendering it with only certain kinds of flora and fauna. The sap of this tree *is*, for the poet, intimately Basque. As we shall see, Amezttoy inverts this anthropomorphism and paints humans that are intimately tree-like.

There is a strange historical paradox in this ecological and cultural logic of inclusion and exclusion, predicated on the categories of ethnicity and species. While the Basque Country has generated a plethora of anthropological and ecological evidence asserting its uniquely ancient heritage, its culture also contains many foreign elements. The *fueros*, what Sabino Arana, the founder of Basque nationalism, described as *Lagi-Zara* (old laws), were codified in Spanish not Basque. More recently, the Basque Country has attempted to re-market its look to appeal to global capital and the tourism industry, most notably along the river Nervión in Bilbao's post-industrial cityscapes. It is tempting to look at this recent development as "post-national" rejecting the exclusionary tendency of Basque nationalism due to the desire of local identities to compete in a common global market place.<sup>57</sup> Annabel Martín, however, describes the move as a kind of "designer nationalism," meant to give Basque identity an appealing "look" in a global world ("A Corpse" 214-17). Amezttoy exposes the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnocentric nationalism as a *process* withering away, giving way to new mutations of

Basque identity through his experimental landscapes. In Amezttoy, Basque nationalism loses its ontological footholds in the landscape and becomes one (destructive) iteration among other possibilities. But I would argue that Amezttoy does more than simply critique nationalism. His paintings become a collage of objects obscuring the lines between the wild and the domestic, between the borderlines of human and nonhuman, a process akin to what Marjorie Perloff has described as the “decomposition” of images inherent in collages (53). In contrast to a fixed episteme of the pure territory of ethnocentric nationalism, Amezttoy re-fashions these reified landscapes not as the natural “depth” of ancient souls, but rather as cultural and ecological masks (*artilugios*) and compositions (Aguado, *Tiempos* 249-50). In this chapter, I approach Amezttoy’s work as a collection of interrelated collages, which read into how Basque nationalism is formed and how it has mutated. This process challenges the “deep” deployment of nature in Basque nationalism through the concepts of the *Umwelt*, the frame and the anthropomorphic gesture.

Discussing the fixity of landscape as an ideological backdrop for national identity, Jon Juaristi tells the story of *insignis* pine and eucalyptus trees in the Basque Country.<sup>58</sup> During the late nineteenth century, the agronomist engineer and member of the Basque agricultural oligarchy Joaquín Adán de Yarza began to introduce the pine species as a means to combat deforestation that had begun to occur at the end of the eighteenth century. As farms of the new trees began to sprout up, many, who had received a “traditionalist, Rousseau-inspired, anti-industrial” formation, became angered and burned down the tree plantations (323). Juaristi observes:

The Basque Country must be the only place in the world where an ecological organization once existed—of a radical, nationalistic leaning—that dedicated its efforts to the burning of pine and eucalyptus plantations. (Ibid)

This episode gives us fresh insight into the metaphorical sap that began this chapter. An ethnocentric Basque nationalism does not identify with nature *as such* but rather identifies with a certain iteration of natural objects, desired to eternally represent the national “soul” of the Basque Country. This soul must be *framed* and *encapsulated* within a certain order of nature. This particular natural terrain must be set apart and insulated in order to insure the purity of a race. In this way, the search for ethnographic origins is also the search for, and the desire to maintain, a certain landscape as the museum of nature. These claims require further elaboration of the history of Basque nationalism and the mounting of a critique in what Timothy Morton has described as eclogocentrism: the imaginary of nature based on a particular logic or order, which ultimately excludes difference, mutation and change (“Eclogocentrism” 74-75).

As Nathan Richardson reflects in his recent work dedicated to re-thinking space and place in Iberia, the Basque Country draws excessive attention to the political question of landscape. Due to the fact that the Basque Country is “a stateless nation” consisting of territory in both Spain and France, this sentiment of locale is, in part, pre-historical or mythical. For example, there is contention over the naming and number of places contained within the unity of “the Basque Country.” While the general linguistic region of Basque is often designated simply as the Basque Country, the cultural area includes four distinct provinces in Spain (Álava, Guipúzkoa, Vizcaya and Navarra) and three in France (Bayona, Oloron-Sainte-Marie, and Pau). Common knowledge has dictated that



this terrain collectively adds up to one stateless nation ( $4 + 3 = 1$ ). Yet the ambiguity between political borders raises questions about how the cultural differences and continuums of these communities (Richardson, *Constructing* 262-63). Navarra, for instance, is a separate autonomous community from the Basque Country but many culturally identify the region with the “stateless nation” of the Basque Country. It becomes historically and culturally difficult to determine what is inside and what is outside of these borders.

The founder of modern Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana y Goiri (1865-1903), also raises the question of territory. For Arana, the Carlist wars were fought in order to maintain the system of the *fueros*. The use of folklore and local mythology became a way to bolster national sentiment in the first Carlist war (1833-1839). When these privileges were lost in the second Carlist war (1872-1876), this mobilization of local culture intensified as many resisted the loss of the traditional economic system. This resistance began to underscore a need to preserve a consciousness distinct from the rest of Spain. This consciousness of identity links directly with the terrain itself. After the defeat of the Carlists in 1876, Basque nationalists began to rewrite a history that supported this ethnic distinction. This desire to ethnically distinguish the Basque from the outsider is what produced the aforementioned historiographic and anthropologic “evidence” of the deep *longtemps* of the Basque race. While many inside and outside of the Basque Country certainly do not share his vision, Arana’s influence continues to have incredible tenacity.

As the second Carlist war ended and abolished the foralist system, a period of rapid industrialization began in the provinces of Bizcaya and Guipúzkoa. Indeed, Juan Pablo Fusi argues that the destruction of the *fueros* set the stage for these ensuing

economic developments (*El país vasco* 16-17). As industries such as mining and factory work boomed, the cities were inundated with migrants from other parts of Spain, categorized by Arana as *maketos*.<sup>59</sup> In addition, more traditional jobs in the agricultural sector declined as the dominant vocation (Corcuera 47-48). Between 1800-1910, migration more than doubled, predominantly in Bizcaya. Most notably, Bilbao's population grew from 25,000 to 230,000 (Richardson, *Constructing* 264).

Industrialization, of course, changed the structure and experience of landscape, introducing unstable cityscapes into the fold. As it began to disappear, the rural place became an idealized image in defense of foral structures. Set against the rural setting of the *fueros*, Bilbao, among other urban areas, was perceived as a menacing presence. The nationalist sentiment tied itself to a particular rural and natural imaginary that was perceived to be disappearing. For Antonio Elorza, the idealization of the rural was a major cornerstone in early twentieth-century Basque nationalism (Elorza, *Tras la huella* 47). These dynamic sociological factors situated newly minted nineteenth-century industrialized areas within a traditionally rural society. One of the results of these changes was the birth of Arana's Basque nationalism. Arana began to fervently advocate for Basque independence, the restitution of the foral system, the codification of the Basque language and *anti-maketismo*: the need to ethnically and ecologically separate what is Basque from what is foreign. For Arana, Basque identity was a race and culture completely separate from the rest of Iberia.<sup>60</sup> Ideologically, what should separate the Basque race from *maketo* influences is the preservation of a rural world: a natural(ized) world and practices to be defended from outside invasion.

These verses from Basque poet Emeterio Arrese highlight this nationalist vision

of Arana:

Hasta el campo, y la tierra, y los árboles, y los montes, y las aguas del regato, y las paredes del viejo caserío de Aguirreolea parece como que se regocijan y alegran...Es que el Alma Vasca, que vive y palputa en ellos, se alegra y regocija con la vuelta del hijo a su antiguo hogar. (Qtd. in Elorza, *Un pueblo* 206)

The *viejo caserío* or *basseri-etxea* marks not only the site of belonging and home to a specific Basque Soul, but also engenders the reified rural *image* that Ameztoy challenges with his strange collages. Arrese gives a particular ordering to the Basque world that originates from a land free of foreign influences. On this view, Basque ruralism is an enclosed monad, incapable of accepting outside influences or producing multicultural art or literature.

While much of Arana's influence has waned, insofar as most Basque intellectuals reject his conclusions, his basic preoccupations about the perpetuation of Basque identity continue to be an issue. Of course, most scholars, citizens and artists call into question the ethnic foundations of Basque separatism and the consequential violence experienced during the twentieth century through the Basque terrorist group ETA. Contrary to Arana's racial nation, Fusi and Elorza, among others, view the Basque Country as a multilingual, pluralist society (247-49; 359). But what is of interest here is not simply the demise of a horrifying form of nationalism, but rather the unconscious pervasiveness of this ideology in the sphere of Basque cultural production. Arana's territorial frame for a pure race does violence to the actual cultural and ecological diversity of the region.

In his article, "Ecologocentrism: Unworking Animals," Morton argues that deconstruction is at the aid of ecological thinking because it helps us question the

epistemological stability of nature. He contends that much of environmentalism is plagued by a reified order of nature, which exhibits a certain esthetics of nature without engaging in questions of co-existence and biodiversity. Consequently, our “view of nature” is unable to grapple with the ecological and cultural diversity that compose landscapes. Just as Derrida argues that logocentrism is at the heart of western thinking, so too is ecogocentrism at the heart of many forms of Basque landscape painting.<sup>61</sup>

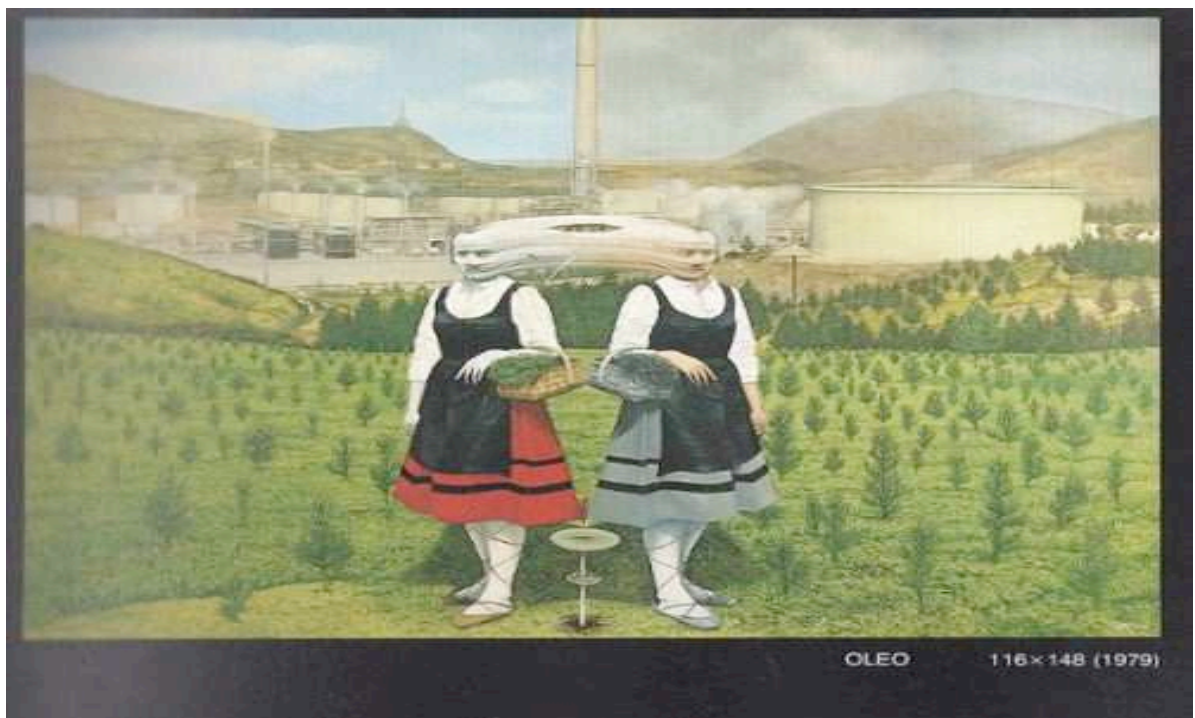


Fig. 7

Ameztoy’s 1979 oil painting (fig. 7) undertakes to capture the undesirable images that do not fit into the ecogocentric vision of nature. The painting above exhibits two such phenomena: industrialization and deforestation. The foreground yields a doubling of two human figures dressed in traditional Basque clothing whose heads have mutated or morphed into one another. The two figures are mirrored copies of one another, each

holding a basket filled with vegetation only differing in the color of dress and basket. While the doppelgangers both look askance to the left and right, the center of their bridging flesh provides an opening for two eyes gazing directly at the spectator. Around them grow hundreds of iterations of *insignis*: the pine trees mentioned above by Juaristi. The backdrop is industrial with an operational factory giving producing steam or smog. Moreover, the industrial as the ground of the painting connects to the twin figures through a peculiar extension of its own piping. Its machinery has seemingly punctured the flesh of the human figure.

This painting critiques Arana's logos of rural life through the inclusion of elements that do not fit into its esthetic order. For example, Amezttoy injects time into a world that is desired to remain stagnant and unchanging because he accounts for the changes brought about by industrialization and deforestation. In other words, Amezttoy rejects a static iteration of rural lifestyle and instead places the iconically dressed Basque figures (*poxxpoliñas*) on the plain of an alternative ecological history, which includes factories and the undesired iterations of *insignis* pine trees. Violently asserting a "lost" order of nature through what I described above as ecologocentrism, then, as a frame for ethnocentric nationalism, is exposed as a fraudulent image out of touch with the actual state of the region. Put differently, Amezttoy's painting denaturalizes the traditional backdrop of Basque landscape and instead juxtaposes traditional objects with the undesirable elements of industrialization and deforestation. In its place, Amezttoy documents a wide variety of cultivation and mutation at work in twentieth-century Basque life.

### 3b. Basque Nationalism as a Museum in an Era of Globalization

In post-Franco Spain, Basque cultural production across different mediums is faced with, whether desirable or not, the challenge of how to integrate local identity into a democracy as well as within the framework of globalization.<sup>62</sup> Put in a question: how does local identity fit into a framework of a globalized world? The cultural situation is one of dire importance because of the history of terrorism and torture involved in the conflict between the Basque terrorist organization ETA and Francoism and subsequently in the post-Franco era. How can Basque cultural production generate an identity that is at once particular yet open to a diverse socio-political spectrum?

One sector of Basque life that seems particularly reified is the rural imaginary utilized by nationalists to portray an unchanging essence of what constitutes “Basqueness.” But what is the state of this rural imaginary in late twentieth-century Spain? Has it disappeared? Or has it transformed? Justin Crumbaugh has pointed out that Bilbao’s “urban renewal” actually has a convergence with another tourist trend of traditional Basque houses (*baserriak*) becoming museums and inns for foreigners. In a new trend called *nekazalturismoa*, visitors stay on functional farms with livestock and crops, often tending to the chores of the establishment (85). Both the urban renewal and the re-enacted rural are superficial reshufflings indicative of the constant re-construction of the “archaic” or “new” that has been occurring for at least a century. For Crumbaugh, tourism has converted the Basque Country into a museum of old and new artifacts, “open” to the gaze of the tourist or, indeed, even to local residents as tourists in their own country.<sup>63</sup> Speaking of urban and rural tourism, Crumbaugh writes:

Both have proved so successful precisely because they have managed, through a hybridization of tourist venues, to occasion a postmodern ontological turn by which the region's museums magically transform their exterior surroundings—whether Bilbao's industrial ruins or the rural culture and countryside—into a nation of museum-like exhibits. (86)

The Basque Country, he explains, has the aura of Benjamin's artifact.<sup>64</sup> Life on the farmstead, or in Richard Serra's maze on the ground floor of the Guggenheim Bilbao require a "recreation" or "exhibition" of the desired values imbued by the tourist gaze.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Basque rural life has become reified into an enclosed and limited niche *as if it were in a museum*. Such a construct dictates that landscape be predicated on an order of what belongs and does not belong in the area, creating an instance of what Morton described above as ecogocentrism. This ecological exclusion, then, forecloses on the ecological and cultural diversity of the area. As we shall see, in Amezttoy, the museum pieces, natural and artificial alike, display a "strangeness" that remains out of joint with the controls of the museum discourse. Amezttoy's landscape paintings, I contend, scatter the museum's privileged gaze into the dense wilds of his work, challenging the notion of the removed observer of nature. Amezttoy instead redraws a new imaginary of Basque identity in which we are, as spectators, entangled with the compositions and the history they capture.

Amezttoy includes the following epigraph from Paul Celan's "Amapola y memoria" in the exhibition catalogue *Karne y klorophila*: "¡Rómpase en pedazos, en los que / somos verdes como la fronda!" At face value, this citation obviously coincides with Amezttoy's project of portraying humans composed of vegetable matter insofar as Celan

asserts a need to pull apart preconceived notions and bodies in order to re-arrange them like the fronds of a palm. Celan and Ameztoy also share a deeper similarity in that they both push the limits of their respective representational languages. Celan searched for a meaningful way to write poetry after the Holocaust. As Ofelia Ferrán has pointed out:

La poesía de Celan es una vertiginosa sucesión de inversiones retóricas de conceptos tradicionalmente estables como los de pasado y presente, lenguaje y realidad, metáfora y metonimia, vida y muerte. A través de esta lista de inversiones retóricas, a través de un lenguaje que quiebra su misma estructura gramatical, se genera en esta poesía una falta de estabilidad radical que es, de hecho, la falta de estabilidad experimentada por un mundo en que Dios, desde luego, ha muerto. (43)

Poetry's traditional devices and themes have lost their stability due to the traumatic event of the Holocaust.<sup>66</sup> In the register of landscape painting, Ameztoy's viewers experience a similar loss of the traditional distinction between background and foreground, the categories that allow one to decipher what constitute the "significant marks" of a given painting.<sup>67</sup> The flora and fauna that typically compose the backdrop of a painting seep into and intertwine themselves with the subject matter of the painting. In this way, Ameztoy's visual language inverts common imagery in landscape painting.

### 3b. The Frame in Ameztoy's Ruralism

One way Ameztoy inverts painting's language is through his play of frames within the painting itself. The earlier evoked vegetative sap, combined with rocks, land formations, and certain animals are the stuff of landscapes, a persistent style in Basque painting.<sup>68</sup> But what characterizes a landscape the most is the ordering of the human gaze.



This gaze is precisely what becomes decentralized, scattered and mutated in Amezttoy. Indeed, Amezttoy is interested in moments when the “museum of nature” comes back to life and defies our frame for viewing it.<sup>69</sup>

What makes Amezttoy unique is that he inverts the sap metaphor, often constructing human forms out of flora or sometimes almost entirely avoiding the representation of human bodies, at least as we typically conceive of them. His style, along with this subject matter, has not only been influential across Basque painting but also across different media, such as film and theater. He worked with Julio Medem designing sets for *Vacas* (1993), a film often found meditating on landscape painting and animalic perspectives. Amezttoy’s images also crisscross multiple scenes of *La pelota vasca* (2003).<sup>70</sup> Despite his status as an influential Basque painter, the critical reception of his work varies greatly. Several critics consider his work to be an expression of the “authentic” Basque soul, while others, most notably Txetxu Aguado, have argued that Amezttoy denaturalizes this identity aspect of Basque landscape painting. His influences and style tempt a variety of interpretations. Some consider his work to be properly surrealist, following the style of André Breton while others see it as hyperrealist or even anti-surrealist.<sup>71</sup> Others see influences of John Ruskin’s naturalism and a pre-Raphaelite tendency.<sup>72</sup>

There is, I think, much room for speculation. Most of his pieces, while hinting at similar motifs and subject matter, are untitled and, in this sense, release the content to the realm of the viewer’s speculation and association. Amezttoy is all the more enigmatic because of his nontraditional training. For a short time, he did attend the San Fernando Art School in Madrid but ultimately dropped out, preferring to work “outside” of formal

training. While I think it is a stretch to consider him an “outside” artist, it is true that Amezttoy resisted many of the realist styles popular in late twentieth-century Spanish painting.<sup>73</sup> Yet it is possible and useful to locate stylistic and cultural predecessors from across Europe. As mentioned above, one influence the painter himself has acknowledged is the Belgian painter René Magritte, who is, of course, famous for “La trahison des images” (1928-29).<sup>74</sup> Magritte is of particular interest in this analysis because he also is known for several challenging landscape pieces that experiment with the frame and relationship between the spectator and the artificiality of painting.<sup>75</sup> This comparison provides a useful insight into the speculative or investigative nature of how Amezttoy deconstructs the imaginary of landscape qua museum. His process works like a collage because it does not reject or avoid “Basqueness,” but rather obsessively constructs double readings of the heterogeneous objects related to the region. That is to say, one can read the parts of the superficial, cut-up objects constructing many of his paintings as well as the whole of the landscape they compose.



Fig. 8

One of the few works given a title and the only oil painting I will discuss with a title is rather descriptive: “Virginia y blancanieves comen un bote de amanitas, mientras el mundo se les viene encima” (fig. 8, 1977). At its center, a couch appears out-of-place in the middle of an open field. Snow White and Virginia, Amezttoy’s wife and frequent model, sit and share a can of *amanitas*, hallucinogenic and semi-toxic mushrooms as the world(s) wash over them.<sup>76</sup> Behind the couch there are three fields divided by small thickets of blurry vegetation and perhaps what stands out at least as much as the couch, four differently sized spheres floating or sinking into the terrain. The world spinning around them seems to juxtapose several disparate landscapes, a trope common throughout much of Amezttoy’s work. Indeed, the reader will recall that this pictorial technique is similar to Jorge Riechmann’s poetic meanwhile because it produces simultaneity amongst heterogeneous elements.<sup>77</sup> This landscape becomes the juncture of several connected worlds, blended together to compose a single image. The idea, then, of a unitary landscape predicated on human vision is on par with a pop culture fantasy. The ordering of nature, consequently, is relegated to the level of fiction.

Yet Amezttoy also emphasizes the borders between different interlocking terrains, particularly through his inclusion of the mysterious spheres. The heterogeneous elements here: *Blancanieves*, the couch, the mushrooms and the spheres represent a tendency we will see throughout Amezttoy’s work. This style is similar to what Magritte’s concept of the “single poetically disciplined image.” The composition of a series of seemingly unrelated objects within a single frame:

The art of putting colors side by side in such a way that their real aspect is effaced, so that familiar objects—the sky, people, trees, mountains, furniture, the

stars, solid structures, graffiti—become united in a single poetically disciplined image. The poetry of this image dispenses with any symbolic significance, old or new. (Frasnay)

While the landscape appears singular, it is also disjointed and full of frames and borders. The spheres, for example, appear impenetrable as if they were distant planetary bodies. Yet these astronomical monads do not remain in the distance but rather seem to sink into the earth. Such an arrangement of heterogeneous objects asks us to consider what they might have in common and, moreover, how they render a landscape painting strange. Indeed, this technique coincides with Perloff's description of the "collage principle of juxtaposition of disparate items without any explanation of their connection" (55). It goes without saying that such a landscape wanders far away from generic landscape painting into a region of experiment, ambiguity and speculation. What kind of experiment is this? What does it do conceptually and formally?

Ameztoy asks us to consider the presence of the spectator and the artist as beings already implicated and entangled within the *artifice of nature*. The couch and the act of being seated on a couch are typically thought of as indoor phenomena; if nature viewing begins from a couch, it will involve some kind of screen, window or frame. However, these "worlds" collide or "crush" in a piece of fantasy. Instead of a static image of landscape, Ameztoy provides a sensation of movement like watching nature as a television show or movie. And this is, I would argue, the "world" of Ameztoy's painting: a self-reflexive project that questions the status of the objects it represents. As Virginia and *Blancanieves* sit contemplating their hallucinations, we must ask ourselves if it is art

that must conform to nature or if nature has indeed conformed to the artwork—to the reiteration of a reified image of the wild.<sup>78</sup>

Annabel Martín follows Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor languages, dividing Basque cultural production into major and minor categories (Olaziregi, *Writers* 172). The major strategy upholds political doctrines such as nationalisms or imperialisms: even if our understanding of these “truths” is tangential, they do in fact exist and have repercussions.<sup>79</sup> Major affirmations of political and cultural power are games with shadow puppets. If ultimate truth is not accessible, then it is impossible to affirm it absolutely in the realm of appearances. Amezttoy's style calls attention to the artificial nature of truth in the major strategy. For Deleuze and Guattari, this sort of language ceases to be representational and instead begins to behave erratically, as if it were jumping off the page or the canvas (22). Martín argues that the major strategy reworks homogenous, ethnic, racial and exclusionary forms of Basque nationalism, to embrace many policies of neoliberal capitalism, such as the economic “opening up” of the Basque Country on international tourist markets. As one of the selling points of Basque culture, the museum's major strategy indexes and catalogues history, agricultural practices and territory to fit into the narratives of Basque nationalism. This narrative frame produces what seems to be a stable, unchanging view of landscape as the backdrop for nationalism. This stability seems to produce a world, what we will soon consider as the *Umwelt*, that forecloses on an understanding Basque identity as an open process in constant negotiation. A minor strategy, on the other hand, entails “a feeling of strangeness in one's own language” that draws out the artificiality of the major strategy (Deleuze 19). While language is obviously subject to de-emphasis in visual mediums, Amezttoy, as we shall

see, encodes his images with a wide breadth of semantic weight, as he recycles and mutates many images associated with the history of the Basque Country.

One kind of minor strategy that we have begun to explore is Amezttoy's strange ruralism: a re-approach to the mythological and rural imagery used to represent Basque identity. Strangeness, a term we should approach with care, examines the ambivalent aspects in a cultural object: how its influences and environments cannot be conceived from one "national" origin, defined as either Basque or not Basque. This taxonomic *aporea* complicates the notion of the Basque Country as a stable museum on display and activates the site of landscape as a dramatic re-evaluation of Basque ethnography. Amezttoy's ethnographic landscape painting blurs the lines between what should and should not belong in this space. Basque-ness, then, becomes less of a stable unity and more of an open process (Olaziregi, *Writers* 172). Amezttoy begins his project by exploring these ambivalences in the genre of landscape painting. He is, as Vicente Molina Foix observed, working as a naturalist looking to re-examine the relationships, vectors and scales in Basque landscapes. His work becomes oniric concatenations of masks, dolls and haystacks, which denaturalize the major strategy of Basque nationalism and unearth a different kind of convergence between humans, plants, machines and animals. Amezttoy's art is the investigation of difference and similarity, which breaks down the categories of human and nonhuman as well as the local and the foreign.



Fig. 9

Consider the untitled oil from 1984 (fig. 9). Three-quarters of the painting is dedicated to tracing the entanglement of dense foliage, what some have noted is Ameztoy's reflection not on the *claro del bosque* (a forest clearing) but on *lo frondoso del bosque*: the wild, entangling thicket of the forest (Karne 12). Though extremely detailed, the vegetation yields few decipherable images: two hands, one encased in human flesh and another enmeshed in green, a broken stick and Ameztoy's re-occurring upside-down split 'Y' twig shape. Moreover, the vegetation varies throughout the painting. There is, for example, a clear shade of green at the center of this panel, reflecting the Y-shape of the twig above it, vaguely mirroring the regional borders of the Basque Country. In the bottom right corner, presenting an almost free-floating hand, there is a lighter shade of green, when compared to top center and top right portions of

the painting. The other quarter of the painting offers a division of different, mixed-up panels. While these images themselves display a more ordered, “cleared” landscape, their order is confused, like layered images out of a window or door. While all of the panes seem to provide a gaze onto a landscape, the left pane is ajar, offering yet another layer of landscape behind the one displayed by the majority of the panels. In sum, this piece mixes together a variety of different terrains and perspectives, creating a collage of multiple frames.

What is the relationship between these tacked-together frames? In my view, this painting functions as a collage of images, beginning to pull apart the objects and machinations that typically compose “the stuff” of landscape painting while also introducing “unacceptable” elements into the mix. One of these machinations is the traditional distinction between figure and ground. Just left of the Y-shape dividing line, the entangled vegetation appears thatched together almost as if it were demarcated in a grid, seeming to impose an ordered space on the thicket. Yet Amezttoy’s detailed leaves and twigs quickly overwhelm the grid’s attempt at order. In its place, Amezttoy obliterates the standard distinction between figure and ground and presents the ground as the subject matter of the piece.

This decomposition of order is also clear in the other attempt at order in the left one-quarter pane, which displays a view across a fence and into the fields beyond. The painting’s upper left-hand corner shows this to be mere simulacra, exposed by the opening of the window onto a darker perspective beyond the pristine. This landscape *trompe l’oeil* is another homage to Magritte, whose landscapes often became ontologically shaky in light of the windows, doors and portals that often project that



terrain as mere simulacra. Reflecting on Magritte's frames, Patricia Allmer writes that: "Magritte exposes the immanence of the frame, as if it were always on the horizon of visual experience—as if it were that very horizon" (148). This horizon frames deceit. As viewers it becomes impossible to decipher what it is that we have seen. Amezttoy privileges the frame as a constant in the act of the gaze, but entangles it within the vegetation of the painting. Such an inquisition of a landscape's "depth" is an important illustration of Amezttoy's minor strategy to question the ordering of the rural world as a set of relics and static iconography. In this painting, the vegetation has grown out of the frame that attempts to enclose it.

The notion of the gaze is given further emphasis with the bizarre membrane growing between two diagonally intersecting sticks, at the center of which we find a single eye gazing back at the viewer. This double-stick-Cyclops figure also seems to have growth on top of its "head" that blends into the backdrop behind it. Indeed, its body, if it ever had one, has already melted into this dense background. The position of the "eye" is also significant because the viewer must pass "through it" or "by it" in order to see the one-quarter orderly landscape. In this sense, though the eye certainly gazes back at us, it also acts as a lens that we must gaze through to see the ordered landscape. The rest of the painting, in contrast, gives preference to tactile contact through the two hands intertwined within the thick vegetation. In this way, reminiscent of Sabadell's sacrifice of the visual examined in chapter two, Amezttoy gives us two conceptual approaches to the wild: the visual, distanced and orderly landscape, framed by the "eye" and the close contact with the entangled thicket.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the strange, dense and tactile wild spatially prevails over the ordered taxonomic vision of nature.

With regard to the two kinds of nature proposed by Amezttoy, it is important to examine the relationship between the one-quarter panel and the rest of the painting. While the top left panel of the entire piece delivers what we might most often consider to be the focus of a landscape painting, Amezttoy delivers what seems to lie below and to the side of this view from the density of a forest. In *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament* (1988), Joseba Zulaika documents and discusses a wide variety of customs related to the aforementioned traditional Basque house known as *Baserriak* or *baserri-etxea*. The word *baserri* itself is a combination of *basa* (wild) and *herri* (ambiguously meaning settlement, home or people) (240-44). These notions correspond to the visual and tactile approaches provided by Amezttoy. One constant theme of Zulaika's discussion is the division between the wild lands surrounding the *baserri* and the farmed, "settled" land. He writes:

In the ideological projections of the *baserri* way of life there is an attempt to recapture the original experience that existed prior to the perceived ills of the present civilization. As animals and plants may present themselves alternatively in the form of a culture (domesticated, grafted) state as well as in their *basa* (natural) state, so, too, can persons undergo ritual transformation into baso-mutillak through the temporary social segregation of the woodcutters or by turning into *basa-kristauak* by virtue of a "wild" occupation such as hunting. The *erri* society realizes "its natural" state in the *baserria*. (244)

Zulaika further elaborates on Crumbaugh's analysis of rural tourism as a re-creation of an archaic way of life. The human becoming wild entails severing ties to human communities. This draws out the intimate connection between the *basa* (*desenfrenado*,

wild or the thicket) and *erri* (*el claro*, the settled clearing). Each of Amezttoy's landscapes examines the ambivalence present in the word *baserri* and the rural lifestyle associated with it. Amezttoy dissects and confuses this notion of the wild and the domesticated, the settled and the open, the seen and the touched. Such an approach is in line with Perloff's concept of decomposition, which disassembles the old system and reconstitutes it as something new (66). In this case, Amezttoy replaces the notion of a removed spectator and entangles us in his tactile, overgrown naturalism. While Zulaika insists that the notions are "cultural metaphors," we must ask: what are the ecological implications of these notions? And secondly, how can ecology read the notion of enclosure as entanglement? These questions require us to further explore the concept of the *Umwelt* as a means to complicate Zulaika's enclosure.

Zulaika's discussion the wild and the settled territory in *Baserri* mythology produces several similarities to the Estonian zoologist Uexküll's concept of the *Umwelt* (environment or surroundings), a term that gained greater prominence through Martin Heidegger's appropriation.<sup>81</sup> The Basque Country, embodied as *baserri* rural life, becomes a life world, similar to Amezttoy's mysterious free-floating and sinking spheres. Though phenomenology wants to begin philosophy again from human experience of "the things themselves," most phenomenological thinkers follow Edmund Husserl and bracket the perception of animals into the natural world, an unknowable arena of alien viewpoints outside the scope of philosophy or science. Uexküll famously extends phenomenology, typically limited to human consciousness, to the animal kingdom.<sup>82</sup> He argues that animals must also be considered a subject at the center of "its own world" (45). An important implication of this thesis is the rejection of the natural world as a determined

machine of brute cause and effect (in contrast to a Cartesian dissection of animality).<sup>83</sup>

For Uexküll, biology, as a discipline, should consider the different relevant “marks” (*Merkmalträger*) of an individual animal, that is, the perceptions of objects significant to the survival and needs of an organism. These “marks” compose the meaning of an animal’s *Umwelt* or sensible world (79-84). One of Uexküll’s most persistent metaphors is the soap bubble:

The space peculiar to each animal, wherever that animal may be, can be compared to a soap bubble which completely surrounds that creature at a greater or less distance. The extended soap bubble constitutes the limit of its world; what lies behind that is hidden in infinity.

(Qtd. In Buchanan 23)

Each world, then, varies according to the sensory apparatus of the organism. Uexküll famously sketches out the world of the tick.<sup>84</sup> The issues that we have seen so far operate similarly to how Uexküll views the *Umwelten* of both humans and animals. The museum of rural life is a collection of “marks” and practices that signify what belongs and what does not belong there. Yet its trouble is accounting for change within this world. On this view, there is a strong sense that the rural ideology of the Basque Country thrives in a fragile bubble threatened or lost due to the invasive alien forces. Ameztoy’s play with framing devices in landscape painting garners a critique against the idea that this permeability between inside and outside, between wild and settled is such an undesirable state of things. I will briefly examine the evolution of Basque nationalism as a kind of *Umwelt* in order to expose precisely what this ideology wants to obscure: a multicultural and ecologically diverse version of the region itself.

### 3c. Anthropomorphism in Amezttoy's Strange Ruralism



Fig. 10

The untitled triptych from 1977 (fig. 10) provides a view into the *Umwelt* of anthropomorphic beings that compose the rank and file of Amezttoy's landscape-gone-haywire. First, it is important to again note the frames, which consist of two open thatched wooden gates, and two arched dissections of a beehive, whose soldiers swarm into the backdrop of the painting. The open gates invite us into what appears to be a family portrait. Upon closer inspection, the bees seem to pollinate each of the five figures and the other objects within the frame. Each figure is composed of different materials.

From left to right, the first figure holds a rotting bouquet of flowers with a bag tied over its head. The next, displaying an image of two figures dressed in traditional Basque costumes (*poxpoliña*) seeming to again be built of hay. The next has a mushroom head (resembling the aforementioned *matamoscas* mushroom), a twig dress and grassy pants with appendages that also look to be built of vegetable matter. The next figure seems to be a composite of another mushroom and a beehive, whose “head” is dissected displaying a cross-section of a hollow interior. The only figure appearing below the fence is built of wooden legs and an entirely green upper body and midsection. This creature holds a giant horseshoe. Finally, there is a variety of objects scattered throughout the portrait, including a four-leaf clover, a pair of shoes buried underground, the numbers “22” spelled out in green vegetative matter sitting on top of an unopened package, and four sets of potted plants.

Beginning from the left, it is tempting to talk about the entire image as one of decay. The flowers have withered away; the ice cream on the fence post has spoiled. It is decay that we encounter in the frame. This is similar to how Perloff described collages as a mode of decomposition. Seen as a whole, it depicts the withering away of the rural image. In this sense, we might read this piece as another critique of a rural image that is rotting away in front of us. And, indeed, there is truth in this reading. In this painting Amezttoy carries out a “superficial re-shuffling” of seemingly unrelated objects, creating an interruption of iconic images that are supposed to remain pristine and easy to “identify” beneath the display glass.

Following the double reading of collages, I would also suggest a second reading of this portrait-collage. His intervention also turns out to be much stranger and minor,

developing bizarre concatenations of couches, puppets, mushrooms and melted ice cream. The wilds of nature, then, as the stuff of landscape, rebel against the landscape medium. This representation runs contrary to one of the motivations to use landscape as a national signifier. Juaristi points out that landscapes as national emblems assume that the terrains of nature will not decay or mutate at the rate of human civilizations. Instead they are supposed to remain “unchanged” or even “unalterable” (319). These landscapes become extensions of a region’s natural soul. If, as Juaristi suggests, landscape is the “prosthesis” of national identity, Amezttoy takes this metaphor literally and intertwines humans with their nonhuman counterparts, creating a confluence between heterogeneous elements that “should not be” in a Basque landscape.

If we read the painting from left to right, the painting seems to defer this totalized reading of decay because the bees, the fungus and the horseshoe creature all seem to thrive. In this way, the painting also draws our attention to the question of anthropomorphism as a central trope in Amezttoy’s work. How are these figures like humans? How are they simultaneously completely alien to what we “classify” as human? Insofar as these figures vaguely seem to have a human form, Amezttoy seems to ask us to connect or compare these elements into something distinctly human. As viewers, however, it is simple to accept these figures as human-like, but difficult to describe as entirely human. In my view, this visual provocation moves us into a different, yet related, analytical ground. Amezttoy challenges us to reconsider the concept and behavior of anthropomorphism in landscape, insofar as nonhumans are used to represent human concerns and values. It is, however, necessary to issue a brief proviso about the very term anthropomorphism. While the term is often viewed pejoratively as humans demolishing

ecological or natural difference thereby humanizing nature, I see the transformation as a productive step forward. By making objects, animals or vegetables “human-ish” we ascribe to them a moment of hypothetical agency. Such a move challenges our definition of anthropomorphism as well as the facile notion of Basque identity as an artifact.

Ameztoy provides few details of his influences and ethnographic sources for his images. In *Karne y klorofila*, however, he does describe his discovery of the Swiss murmurers, known as *Silvesterklause*, which shed light on the bizarre half-human/half-machine figures that populate his ripped-up and refashioned landscapes. In the Swiss Canton of Urnäsch, the ritual of “el Día de San Silvestre” on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December consists of several community members dressing up in vegetable matter and attaching large bells to their bodies (Davis 365). They speak in a jargon completely unintelligible to locals and tourists, acting “with hostility” towards the spectators. The *Silvesterklause* is a human mutated or mutating into a nonhuman. According to Ameztoy, this ritual has been preserved on the margins of the Church due to, in large part, the area’s geographical isolation. He writes: “These photographs had a great impact on me and were central to the development of the concept of *Karne y klorofila*” (*Karne* 35).

In my view, these murmurers become a way to understand the encounter between the museumgoer and their object of pursuit. The anthropomorphism of these murmurers imbues the formerly static *Umwelt* of Basque ruralism with an agency that challenges the framing of the museum. Similar to the above entanglement of the viewer’s gaze, the murmurers no longer remain the spectacle but rather return the gaze of the viewer. To put the problem in a Derridean manner, Ameztoy’s murmurers ask us: “say the vegetable responded?”<sup>85</sup> This anthropomorphic response is encapsulated in the return of the gaze to



the spectator. The landscape here not only receives admiration but also returns with a question to the viewer. The French philosopher Jean-Christophe Bailly has recently pointed out that what makes the gaze of the animal disturbing to us is the increased enigma involved in the exchange. Unlike the human gaze, the animal's gaze is not a supplement to language, but rather the emblem of alien subjectivity. Ameztoy's murmurers return a similar gaze, which ask us, in Bailly's words to "move beyond human exclusivity" and take a "pensive path" in understanding the gazes of animals and, yes, even vegetables (15).



Fig. 11

To continue pondering Amezttoy's challenging anthropomorphism, I turn to one of Amezttoy's paintings analyzed by Txetxu Aguado, who, in my view, offers the most sustained commentary on Amezttoy's work. The untitled painting from 1976 (fig. 11) depicts what seem to be four layers of another family portrait scaling up a staircase in front of a cosmic nocturnal landscape. The first layer consists of two women who actually appear to be entirely human. Designer sunglasses shield us from their gaze. The second layer presents a collection of six half-human/half-vegetative figures. All are seated with their hand loosely sitting across their laps. The next row mirrors the previous with completely ghosted forms, consisting of human shadows shaded with blue sky and clouds, a tactic often used by Magritte. In the final row three mysterious figures, the murmurers, "who" seem obliquely human but "built" entirely from vegetable matter.

What does the transformation from human to vegetation and clouds in these rows of figures mean? In terms of what has already been established, Amezttoy's family portrait confuses the natural backdrop with the foreground. This confusion leads to the denaturalization of a backdrop. Aguado convincingly argues that, by denaturalizing traditional Basque imagery and landscapes, Amezttoy levels down his subjects to what Giorgio Agamben has called *zoe*: "the simple fact of living common to all living beings" or "natural naked life" constitute that which is politically unprotected in a state of exception ("Means" 3, 20).<sup>86</sup> Aguado identifies the family's bare life in that none of them gaze back at the viewer in addition to the fact that most of the members have become vegetables themselves. In so doing, Aguado sees Amezttoy as revealing the natural iconography utilized by ethnocentric nationalists as "el forro metafísico de los objetos." nature is the metaphysical lining of the Basque "depth" associated with its nationalism.

Due to the terrorism and violence caused by this ethnocentric nature, this image has stripped the subjects of their political rights, leaving them only with *zoe*. Ameztoy, for Aguado, hollows out this vision. Ameztoy's landscapes, then, have left Basques politically immobile, or better, planted, out of fear, loss and unrequited mourning. *Bios*, or the capacity for political life as we now envision it, is impossible in Aguado's reading (Aguado 255). He writes:

Ameztoy deconstruye al nacionalismo vasco al presentarlo como ecología, es decir, como una entre otras posibles constituciones del cuerpo político desde el ambiente en que tiene lugar, y no como una ontología, o decirlo en otra manera, como una realización trascendente del ser desde su entorno. (Ibid)

I follow Aguado's observation that Ameztoy does denaturalize landscape painting, which leaves us in the realm of speculating about politics as different assemblies or ecologies. However, I also think that there is more than mere critique of Arana's conservative, violent nationalism. Indeed, Ameztoy's strangeness questions more than the current political immobility of *zoe*. I would argue that Ameztoy challenges the very notion of what Agamben and Aguado mean by "pure life" as a politically inert concept.

From an ecocritical perspective, simply foreclosing on the political potential of *zoe* fails to answer all of the strange forms of life and machine at work in Ameztoy. Moreover, Agamben's theorization on the human and the animal might fall short of what happens in Ameztoy's work. A brief glimpse at his concept of the "anthropological machine" in *The Open* (2004) highlights this murkiness in Agamben. For Agamben, there are two historical appearances of the anthropological machine that either blur the lines between humans and animals or, conversely, make these human/animal divisions more

clear. The ancient version collapses many human qualities into animal forms while the modern version separates human qualities from animal qualities in order to accentuate what truly makes a human human and *who* can be a part of a political system. Symbols, codes, emotions and activities are ciphered into taxonomies of human or nonhuman, “functioning” by a rule of inclusion and exclusion, in a same vein as the museum ethnocentric nationalism. In fact, the landscape qua museum *is* an example of the modern anthropological machine because it draws out what can fit into the concept of a political subject and what cannot participate. Agamben writes on the optical qualities of this process:

It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape.

*Homo* is a constitutively “anthropomorphous” animal [...], who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be man. (*The Open* 27)

Considering Amezttoy’s work as one of these optical machines complicates and arguably gums up the machine in a fatal fashion. Amezttoy’s work disrupts the functionality of the anthropological machine, disallowing rigid distinctions between humans and nonhumans. Indeed, this is what leads Aguado to claim that Amezttoy disallows the possibilities of *bios* as a form of political life outside the state of exception. What do Amezttoy’s failed anthropological machines tell us?

Commenting on Agamben’s machine, both Dominick LaCapra and Dominic Pettman have illuminated several shortcomings. Reflecting on Agamben, LaCapra has stated that, though his work on the animal and politics is of clear importance, Agamben

has a tendency to mystify relationships between humans and animals (or for that matter between animals and animals or between plants and animals, etc.):

Better served by a more differential, complex, understanding of a field of distinctions, differences, proximities, voids, enigmas, wonderments, uncanny twists, and possibilities that cannot be condensed into a human-animal divide or “central emptiness,” whether within “man” or between humans and other animals.  
(174)

LaCapra argues that the lives of humans, animals, vegetables and machines are less like spheres only intruding in a certain, predetermined shading of a Venn diagram and more like a series of tectonic plates colliding and crumbling at different tempos, temperatures and points of collision (173). For LaCapra, what these metaphors suggest is that the relationships between objects, and I include humans on this list, cannot be summarized as a transhistorical phenomenon but rather in their historical specificity. Indeed, the very question of *the* animal is flawed. There is not *one* animal or anthropological machine but rather an almost infinite variation depending on cultural norms and variations. LaCapra worries that Agamben decontextualizes human/animal relations in a mythically modern and transhistorical mode, disallowing ecological and socio-historical variation.

Returning to Ameztoy's work, it is as if the museum's objects, even if they are figuratively tacked down under glass displays and under the guard of armed security personnel, are defying the facile definition given by the gaze of the traveler, the tourist or the passerby. Indeed, these supposedly “vegetative” or “ancient” beings are in open defiance. This artistic reflection is carried out through anthropomorphizing the “stuff” that composes landscapes. As referenced earlier via Bailly, Ameztoy presses us to

consider the *return* of the gaze from the nonhuman. Indeed, if we can unravel a kind of ethics from his work, it would be in line with what Bailly considers to be the realization that landscapes are shared spaces between a variety of shifting *Umwelten*. They are inherently pluralistic and open to changes over time. By the same token, Amezttoy's murmurers transform from painting to painting. One portrait above included a figure mainly built of fungus while another was composed of hay. These kinds of landscapes, then, cease to be entirely human or even about humans. Instead, they are strange documents attesting to an underground ecological diversity and its nonhuman agencies that have slowly overgrown the ideological or mythical restrictions historically imposed on them. What we find instead of a rural world, isolated from political questions, is a place that has been re-written and overrun by overflowing *urbanity* of the polis.<sup>87</sup>

### 3d. Conclusions: The Basque Country as the Basque City

Despite my concluding point in the section above that Amezttoy's painting can be read as almost entirely about nonhumans and the agency of the stuff of landscapes, there are several implications for human politics, most particularly Basque identity politics. As we have seen, twentieth-century Basque nationalism remains a working concept for rural tourism, which functions, by and large, as a living museum, offering a reified version of a more "original" way of life that has not existed since at least the nineteenth century. Amezttoy, as a painter and naturalist of the terrain and objects that populate this rural *Umwelt*, challenges this vision of landscapes as a museum. He offers, on the contrary, a visual response that challenges the framing of the museum itself. These challenges include buried ecological histories including deforestation and industrialization as well as

a re-working of anthropomorphism, which introduces the alien gazes of Amezttoy's murmurers.

Such insights intersect with Basque author Bernardo Atxaga's resonating proposal that what has been heretofore known as *Euskal Herria* (the Basque Country) should be called *Euskal Hirria* (the Basque City). In one lecture, Atxaga explains:

Si nosotros por ciudad entendemos, siguiendo el rastro básico, también clásico, de que una ciudad es una urbe, una urbs, es también una civitas, una sociedad que vive ahí, y es una polis, es decir, es una organización política, aquí de repente, bueno ustedes dirán que no tan de repente, nos encontramos que ésta ya es una región metropolitana prácticamente. (3)

For Atxaga, the designation of country is missing *civitas*: an intercommunication between not only the residents of the area but between those within the city and those outside of it. In part, Atxaga argues that the Basque City would demolish the political barriers and frontiers that plague the idea of *Euskal Herria* because it is no longer necessarily based on a *territory* that is somehow Basque but rather on a polis.

At first glance, such a move would appear to demolish the importance of Amezttoy's work. His painting, so to speak, would sink with the *Umwelt* of Arana's ethnocentric nationalism. Contrarily I contend that the ideas embedded in Amezttoy's work also deconstruct the notion of landscape and territory while also underscoring the importance of nonhumans within the human polis. Amezttoy's strategy of making minor the holistic depth of landscapes with the cluttered clippings and heteroclit objects gives new ways of experiencing life (*zoe*) as a political unfolding. In this way, Amezttoy captures something akin to Jorge Riechmann's *ciudad-bosque*, which also reintroduces

the political and esthetic importance of the rural imaginary into a *polis*. In other words, Ameztoy's painting demolishes nature as the stabilizing framework for a rigid nationalism and gives the "stuff" of landscapes power of their own.



## **Chapter Four: Disappearance**

Acaecieron grandes terremotos é inundaciones, y en el breve espacio de una noche, la  
Atlántida se sumió en la tierra entreabierta.  
-Plato

### **4a. Introduction: Rural (Dis)appearance as a Trope in Catalan Literature**

The last chapter ended on a dark note for ruralism. I introduced Atxaga's argument that *Euskal Hirria* (the Basque City) should replace *Euskal Herria* (the Basque Country) because the latter category of landscape evokes a kind of ethnocentric essentialism due to its evocation of territory as a the site of an isolated Basque homeland. *Euskal Hirria*, on the other hand, generates the prospects of a civil discourse predicated on the notion of polis: the political ordering of the city. While I tentatively agreed with this notion and suggested how Ameztoy's strangely mutated human-animal-machines fit into this urban structure, Atxaga's erasure of the countryside and consequent absorption into the city provokes an important question about the status of rural space, lifestyle and ecological valences: has it disappeared? If so, what are the residues of this concept and way of life? Will it return? If not, what is its status in an overwhelmingly urbanized world? In the years to come, our literary and cultural responses to these questions will contribute to a larger debate about how the hinterland, often as the site of resource pillaging and extraction, will play out. Indeed, one might say that the ecological wellbeing of the planet depends on, by and large, how we conceive of Raymond Williams's old dichotomy between the countryside and the city.<sup>88</sup>

In the important volume *New Ruralism* (2012), Joan Ramón Resina notes that the social sciences and the humanities rarely discuss rural culture and literature because of an

academic preference for considering the urban as the site for innovative art and politics. Urbanism has become the central site of consuming cultural as well as material resources. Without entering deeper into the reasons for this prejudice, I hope it has become clear that I am also interested in introducing the rural back into dialogue with urban discourses. In the Catalan context, political rhetoric has actually long maintained a link between Barcelona and the Catalan countryside. The trouble is, as we shall soon see, that this link is wrought with essentialisms and overly fragmented thinking. There are many examples of the ways that intellectuals attempted to bridge Barcelona with Catalonia's rural areas. The nineteenth-century Catalan urban planner Ildefons Cerdà "extends" this with his dream to expand Barcelona beyond its current limits at the edges of the walls.<sup>89</sup> Antoni Gaudí also famously "flooded" the city with natural images in his *modernisme* architecture and sculpture (Sobrer 205-6). Additionally, the political thinker Antoni Rovira i Virgili coined the term *La Catalunya-Ciutat*, gesturing at the (desired) unity between Barcelona and the hinterland of the region. In what follows, I will offer a brief literary and political overview of this supposed link and offer specific examples of rural novels as a critique of this rhetoric.

Of each of the minority languages examined in this project: Basque, Catalan and Galician, the Catalan language has the longest literary and print culture history. During the middle ages, the Catalan language was a viable competitor against Castilian for circulating texts and, while it certainly did not have a grammarian like Nebrija to codify its language, Catalan did in fact begin to standardize in the same period.<sup>90</sup> However, even today there are many linguistic variances from region to region (e.g. the linguistic differences between Barcelona and Valencia). During the late Renaissance and through

the Baroque, Catalan fell into what is now referred to as the era of *decadència*, due to, in part, the overwhelming use of Castilian as a literary language (Cabo Aseguinolaza 436).

Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth century, Catalan culture underwent a resurgence, known as the *Renaixença*, when poetry became a predominant means to speculate and bolster regional identity. Poets such as Verdaguer wrote idealized poetry about the epic past and future, documenting and lauding the cultural and ecological richness of Catalonia.<sup>91</sup> This kind of nationalist poetry squares with Romantic sentiments attached to homeland, emphasizing localist inspiration and unique forms of subjectivity found in Catalonia's landscapes. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, poetry obsessively reaffirms and documents the physical geography of Catalonia, almost to the point of giving some areas of Catalonia a mythical status. Eventually, the *Renaixença* gave way to other poetic and artistic movements that pushed the question of national identity even further.

*Modernisme* and *noucentisme* openly aligned themselves with early political representatives of *catalanisme*, such as Enric Prat de la Riba and Francesc Cambó. Poets such as Joan Maragall and Eugeni d'Ors doubled as major political figures of their era, often contributing political treatises full of references to their particular brand of esthetics. *Modernisme* and *noucentisme*, however, offered divergent esthetic visions for what the relationship should be between the urban and the rural. *Modernisme*, on the one hand, favored an anti-industrial arcadia, as seen in the poetry and prose of Joan Maragall.<sup>92</sup> As Susan DiGiacomo puts it, *Modernisme* sees language as "springing from the Catalan earth" (161).

*Noucentisme*, on the other hand, was “aindustrial” in the sense that it favored expanding an ordered, urban layout of the countryside while simply excluding the industrial aspects of urbanism. Eugeni d’Ors, for instance, is known for his interest in redesigning urban life in Barcelona through a combination akin to the above mentioned *Catalunya-ciutat*, whose “urbanature” should be ordered, harmonious and logical (Resina, “Barcelona Ciutat” 167).<sup>93</sup> There should be little mistake about d’Ors *noucentisme* project. He wants to make life like his conception of the work of art: ordered, harmonious, and serene in all of its “realización plástico-literaria,” as he puts it in the prologue to *La ben plantada* (1911). This literary-plasticity, speaking of a text that has been chiseled away into visual symmetry, represents what Catalonia looked like in the eyes of d’Ors. It produces a “second nature” *built* to shut out the esthetically and politically displeasing. These esthetic pieces are whittled down into nubs so that they might fit together.

These texts connect to the rural novel in several ways. First of all, early twentieth-century Catalan nationalism was (and is) a discourse influenced by Joaquín Costa’s regenerationism. The goal, especially after the perceived political and cultural demise of Castile in 1898, was to replace Madrid with Barcelona, to re-write the Castilian empire as the Catalan empire. These instantiations of regenerationist dream desired to be in contact with other peripheral nationalities in Iberia. As we shall see, ruralism can become a similar federalist project. In a literary register, there are multiple laudatory exchanges between Miguel de Unamuno and Joan Maragall (Unamuno). There was also interaction between the major figures of *catalanisme* and intellectuals in Portugal and Galicia (Cabo Aseguinolaza 138-39). Even if these regenerationist movements utilized the rural as the

dominant signifier of Catalan identity, the rural, in this nationalist register, remains an essentialized caricature.

According to a recent article in *El País* by author Francesc Serés, it is not the case that these tendencies have altogether disappeared in contemporary Catalan culture, and, I would add, Iberian culture. Discussing a hike with his friends through Segrià, Les Garrigues and la Ribera d'Ebre, Serés observed that his friends were surprised at the harshness of the terrain. For Serés, this distress at the experience of “real” country is indicative of a larger trend:

Cada vez me sorprende menos ver gente tan movilizada por el país y, a la vez, tan sorprendida por la realidad de la mitad de su territorio. Hay un independentismo Twitter que solo se juega ciento cuarenta espacios. Twitter no es el país, ni lo son Facebook o el Instagram. (Cataluñas extremas y duras)

Serés points to a divide between *independentismo*, a contemporary manifestation of *catalanisme*, and the actual state of the countryside.<sup>94</sup> While there may be a trend one could describe as a “new ruralism” that takes up interest in returning to the countryside or simply embellishing its esthetics from inside the city, Serés notes that such a trend ultimately evades approaching the difficult and ruined realities present in rural culture, likening them to the sleek esthetic seen on social media sites such as Instagram or Facebook.

#### 4b. Excavating a Rural Atlantis

Frédéric Mistral’s prologue begins the second edition (1905) of the Catalan poet Jacint Verdaguer’s *l’Atlántida* (1876) with the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter from Plato’s *Timaeus*. Verdaguer’s text is an epic poem emblematic of the nineteenth-

century *Renaixença* movement throughout Catalonia, which sought, as its name suggests, to reinvigorate Catalan culture and literature. Verdaguer's poem is a descriptive epic, establishing lineage between Alcides (Hercules) in Iberia after the demise of Atlantis. Verdaguer then perpetuates the myth into the early modern era, utilizing Christopher Columbus as an epic hero spreading the lineage of this great past into the Americas. What interests me here is certainly not continuing the lifeline of such a genealogy, but rather to comment briefly on Verdaguer's stylistic approach to the myth of Atlantis. Menéndez Pelayo captures what we might describe as Verdaguer's geologic approach to human history:

Soy de los que creen que la descripción de naturaleza inanimada sólo debe aparecer en el arte como accesorio, y cual [sic] sirviendo de fondo a la figura humana. Este es el único o principal defecto que hallo en el admirable poema de mi amigo Verdaguer. El hombre está como absorbido por las grandezas y catástrofes naturales, y ni Hesperides ni Hércules interesan como debieran. Además, las grandes y descomunales fuerzas físicas de Alcides y de los Titanes perjudican al valor moral de sus caracteres e inducen a mirarlos más bien como agentes naturales que como a seres humanos o dotados de pasiones análogas a las nuestras. ("La Atlántida")

Menéndez Pelayo is concerned about the literary absorption of humans into the "deterministic" backdrop of nature. (Amezttoy would be his worst nightmare.) Literature that dwells too long on the agency of nature or nonhuman, nonliving objects, turns humans into ghosts of their own "true" form, denying their apparent "freedom" as humans. Though the critic does not go so far as to claim that Verdaguer is guilty of

demolishing what we have described as anthropocentrism, Menéndez Pelayo seems concerned that the Catalan poet might be on the brink of this temptation. His style, it seems, implicitly says something dangerous about the dependency of human drama on its “natural” surroundings. More recently, critic Lurdes Estruch rightly describes Verdaguer’s supposed dehumanization as a “science fiction-like” idea because it suggests that geology might well be a major actant in the historical formations and disappearances of human society (59). If Verdaguer’s emphasis on geology, plants and animals makes him a science fiction author, then many contemporary novels about rural communities possess some amount of the same inventiveness, insofar as such texts tend to include contemplation about how the slightest flux in ecological circumstances affects agricultural production and human wellbeing. Indeed, in the current geological era dominated by human activity, the truth is not that we wield the forces of volcanoes or fault lines, but rather the irony that, in the Antropocene, we are unable to control the sphere of our own influence on these forces.

While the Atlantis myth is often relegated to a distant past civilization, I would like to consider the phenomenon and literary trope of disappearance on a much more temporally proximate scale. In fact, Cuban author Antonio Benítez Rojo has already made such a suggestion in the Caribbean context as a means to consider the geographically disparate as a unified, yet fragmented cultural and political unity.<sup>95</sup> There are at least two major problems for approaching the Caribbean and, as I will argue, the rural. First, both are geographical zones loaded with essentialisms determined by the outside, viz. by the cultural production of major metropolitan areas. Based on these proscribed essences, the Caribbean is exotic, populated by whimsical, magical people, for

example. The rural is a stagnant sphere of cultural production. Its people are backward and politically uninformed. In the context of Spanish literature, classic examples are bountiful from the pastoral and *cosumbrista* traditions.<sup>96</sup>

Secondly, in undoing these essentialisms, one must wonder about the potential for historicizing and individuating particular socio-historical situations in the rural and the Caribbean. The result is often a literary strategy representing fragmented, if not destroyed communities. Such a representation allows little room for understanding unique geographical terrains as co-extensive in larger political and ecological struggles and projects. In the Caribbean case, Antonio Benítez Rojo ties this to the geography of archipelagos, whose geographical fragmentation he views as limiting to a greater understanding of a contiguous identity united through a series of common events and disasters (“The New Atlantis”).<sup>97</sup>

In the rural case, we must ask how it is possible to write from a landscape after it has already disappeared, or, moreover, how it might be possible to notice unifying structures and tropes in writing the rural novel. In my view, the theme of disappearance itself works as a catalyst for engaging a variety of twentieth-century rural contexts. In Spain alone, novels about a disappeared or disappearing town have become a literary genre. A few prominent examples of these novels include: Jesús López Pacheco’s *Central eléctrica* (1958), Jesús Moncado’s *El camión de sirga* (1989), Julio Llamazares’s *La lluvia amarilla* (1988), and Juan Goytisolo’s *La chanca* (1985). It is important to emphasize that each of these novelists culls his material from a different area in Spain. From Castilla (López Pacheco) and Aragón (Moncado) to León (Llamazares) and Andalusia (Goytisolo) because these individual “islands,” though certainly distinct, share



in this larger concern for the slow death of communities and how one might capture such a death in a literary project.

This approach to the Atlantis myth resonates with contemporary author Catalan language author Francesc Serés's (1972) recent trilogy of novels, *Des femmes i marbles* (2003). Where is it that we, as spectators and implicit participants in today's world, witness or fail to witness the disappearance of human and nonhuman collectives? In the work of Serés, disappearance plagues rural communities in the Catalan-speaking region of Aragón, known as *La Franja* (The Strip). Serés has stated that these fictional terrains are based on his hometown of Saidí (Zaidín). Just as William Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha to capture his vision of rural Mississippi and Gabriel García Márquez invented the magical Macondo to invoke his own childhood experiences on the Colombian coast, or Juan Benet re-writes *Región*, Serés has invented a literary world in order to convey his experience of life in northern rural Spain in the twentieth century. While reading Serés, the reader garners the intense affect related to the land's ability to dominate all aspects of those who reside there. It is, in this sense, that Serés qualifies his Verdaguerian use of literary landscapes not as a backdrop for human activity, but rather as a collection of powerful actants that sway the novel's human protagonists long after they have left the region. He seems to echo Benet's haunting title, *Volverás a Región*: you will return to the Region. It has marked "you" in your formation as a human—in spite of Menéndez Pelayo.<sup>98</sup>

Interestingly, Serés himself has recently commented on the value of the Atlantis myth for considering the writing of the rural novel:

What did they write about, the Atlanteans? What were their stories? We do not know, we never will know. We can think that they wrote a literature that had to do with their insularity, about their relationship with the continent, with land-based literature. They would complain about their isolation and, at the same time, would celebrate it as one of their culture's distinctive traits... There would be masterpieces that someone may have translated or copied, but most of the literature of Atlantis would have been lost. (Resina, *New Ruralism* 183)

Serés speculates about the loss of Atlantean literature and culture as a symbol for the potential disappearance of communities. Moreover, he recognizes the geologic importance of thinking about cultures in conjunction with their terrain. To consider the site of the rural as Atlantis means to symbolically speculate on what may have been lost and what it means to tell the stories of a place that has no literature.

One might consider this disappearance in Serés's two interrelated registers. First, there is the specter of Francoism, which imposed a ban on the use of Catalan for public discourse.<sup>99</sup> Second, Franco's public works, as we will examine in depth below, drastically altered the distribution of resources and, indeed, the very composition of the landscape. As attentive ecocritical readers, such a literary project allows us to consider how terrain, in Serés's oeuvre, becomes an exploration of how objects, landscapes and ecological histories are actants in the maintenance and creation of human identity and memory.<sup>100</sup> In this chapter, I consider the slow loss of the rural not as a completely effaced, forgotten history, but rather as almost illegible gaps in which Serés evokes a fragmentary, incomplete return, re-telling its story as an alternative ecological history of landscapes and human and nonhuman collectives. Such a re-telling requires a careful

literary excavation of geology as a major actant in the text. In order to examine what Serés is able and unable to discover, I will focus on the first novel of his trilogy emphasizing three interrelated themes that begin to sketch out an alternative ecological history of the La Franja region: photography, deformity and water.

#### 4b. Amateur Photography as the Object of Memory

*Els ventres de la terra* (2000) is the first novel in Serés's rural trilogy. This novel approaches rural landscapes of the unnamed protagonist's childhood, as well as other family episodes, through a series of interconnected memory pieces, which relate the family's flight from the farm, the main character's vocation as an engineer in Barcelona and a final return to sell the farm. Each chapter is marked with a particular infinitive (such as: *mirar* (to look), *sentir* (to feel), *ser* (to be), *desconocerse* (to not know or to disown)). The generative stance of each verb investigates a particular impression of quotidian rituals ranging from labor and love, to writing and harvesting. Additionally the infinitives trace a sentiment or physical movement with respect to the town, whose name is not mentioned in the text. The novel does not simply index the development from childhood to adulthood but works through prolepsis and analepsis, documenting leaps of 2 to 72 years. Francisco Solano points out these sketches and short interrelated narratives are not so much written but are instead whispered to the reader ("Los principios"). Indeed, they seem to be faint etchings of a much larger, untold story. These narrative gaps offer separate episodes while also ambivalently blurring the boundaries between each of the narrative passages ranging from the years of 1893 to 1998. In the present time of the novel, the protagonist works as an engineer near the town of Lleida. Coinciding with these time lapses and leaps, Serés moves from rural to urban settings as well as

throughout the family's genealogy and, therein, through the history of a town that has ceased to exist as it once was. Due to multiple public works projects in the Franja region, the town's natural water supply dissipated and destroyed the region's agricultural potential. Simultaneously, factory jobs became a more lucrative option in the nearby city of Lleida and even Barcelona. These economic developments shifted the ecological viability of the town for agricultural work and left in its wake only "those waiting to die." The novel, moreover, also moves beyond the locale of the town and looks at the effects of public projects such as hydroelectric dams throughout the entire Franja region. Indeed, at one point the narrator explains that the history of the town's disappearance is a history of "el maltrato del agua."

The first chapter "Incipit (1996)," the only chapter not titled with a simple verb infinitive, begins with the unnamed protagonist examining a blurry photo his father took before the narrator's birth:

Una polaroid, demasiado amarilla como para afirmar que es una buena fotografía, que mi padre hizo desde el pasillo, enfocando hacia la cocina, donde mi madre llena de agua las botellas de plástico, ese agua que los primeros días deja regusto de limonada o de naranjada. (7)

The photograph, faded all the more with time, grants us an imperfect view of a former *Umwelt*, not merely focused on the human elements, his mother and father, but on an entire household of objects and resources, which ultimately contain the barely decipherable images that populate Serés's fiction. The photographic lens operates as a temporal conduit not only to a previous time but also a means to investigate: "Where are

we now?” and also “Where were we then?” Yet the answers provided by the photographic medium are more obstructive than instructive.

La pregunta de las fotos. Ahora, la respuesta es más sencilla, mejor dicho, la ausencia de respuesta es más fácil de entender o de soportar, pero cuando era pequeño formulé muchas veces sin ningún éxito—respuestas decepcionantes—la pregunta que mi hermana repitió años después con el idéntico resultado. ¿Dónde estaba yo cuando mi madre llenaba las botellas? ¿Dónde estaba antes de nacer, se preguntaba ella, cuando yo aparecía fotografiado dentro de la bañera pequeña. (9)

The narrator speculates that the photograph answers its own question: “you are nowhere in particular.” His sudden childhood appearance in these images is like the flash of the camera. Before that moment, he was simply “nowhere in particular.” Yet this flash always points to a phenomenon akin to an X-Ray, illuminating a withdrawn presence of the narrative voice within the environment, or the *ventres* of the home and its surrounding terrain. Nowhere at all comes to mean anywhere at all. Consequently, this search is not simply about the need for self-identification but rather about the attempt to encounter a lost world. In this sense, the search for identity is as much about the self (the internal, psychological memories) as it is about the non-self (surrounding objects). Both categories become intertwined in a past of blurry photographic phantoms that lives and breathes even after its disappearance.

The protagonist’s sudden “flash” alludes to the sudden apparition of identity of the self within a milieu of non-identity, whether it is geographically located in or near the town or, on the other hand, in a distant city. This milieu is enumerated as lists of objects, people and animals in varying states of life, sometimes alive and well and other times

dead or silent. In accordance with the title of Serés's novel, *Els ventres de la terra*, this is not merely some kind of affirmation of the idea that the *ventres*, or larger environments, are a generative site for memory, but rather that the town becomes a nexus for exploring larger ecological changes in La Franja throughout the twentieth century. The rural is not, in this sense, a niche insulated from outside influence, but is, instead, full of signs, structures, causes and effects on local and nonlocal levels.

The photographic issue is about time and its relapse. The theme of photography, in this sense, helps to understand the fragmentary temporal leaps at work in the text. "Incipit" presents the first words of softly etched and often poor, faded or destroyed images of a past to which the narrator cannot return. The image, then, as a frozen frame of a larger invisible history, only provides, as Walter Benjamin puts it, an "inexact" way of understanding the quotidian in a rural setting. It is a part that gestures at a larger, absent whole. Indeed, Benjamin reflects that photographs make possible a rendering of an optical unconscious through their inherent time lapses and enlargements (203). The photograph constantly alludes to what is not visibly or consciously represented within the frame. The camera opens a speculation about the status and import about the "physiognomic" properties of images. That is to say, photography has less to do with the holistic "moody landscape" and more to do with the objects and structures that determine, or attempt to determine, rural life such as "structure, cell forms, the improvement of medicine." This shift away from the moody holism of a landscape and towards a careful account of physiognomic properties allows us to consider the rural not as some nostalgic image, but rather as a shifting set of withdrawn, stubborn objects inscribed with narratives only available to us in a semi-visible spectrum. The various temporal leaps

between each chapter in the novel act like short photographic essays of a longer narrative that remains only partially revealed at the end of the text. Serés's prose, I argue, exhibits this optical unconscious in its very style, in which the writing might not tell the whole story, but it does give us pieces and fragments in order to gather a metonymic read on a larger rural milieu.

Such a reading of "Incipit" places Serés's project quite close to the work of the anthropologist, whose research documents the disappearing rituals and practices of endangered or disappeared communities. If one reads Serés as an anthropologist, then his trilogy is about archiving a lost world. This position, however, seems not only misleading but also beyond the scope of the literary project. While there is an anthropological trope present in the novel, as it is a survey of ruins, Serés is much less interested in photographically "documenting" but rather using photography as a literary motif for creating a novel about a disappeared community. Photographs become fragmentary metonyms for a larger story that is unavailable to the reader. I will later refer to this literary device as photographic metonyms. Objects, in Serés, serve as "a meeting point" for the generation of memories. Medievalist Eileen Joy notes that, in ancient Iceland, the term "thing" meant a meeting point for members of a community to resolve issues through civil discourse (as opposed to resorting to violence). This second perspective is in line with William Viestenz's reading of Jesús Moncada, another Catalan author writing about *La Franja*. Speaking of Moncada's novel *Camí de sirga* (1988), Viestenz explains that:

Not only may an object absorb imagery of the past, but the relationship between the encapsulating thing [...] is not strictly sympathetic, as the recollections, in

sensing a potential liberation from their crystal prison, rise to the surface in anticipation. (190)

Novels about disappeared towns need not be strictly anthropological, but rather tend to explore the human impact of telling stories about places and objects that have since disappeared. Objects, though they incite memories, also resist our complete apprehension of the narratives they might contain. They are, like Heidegger's tools, withdrawn from our use.<sup>101</sup> As if following Benjamin's lead, Serés's photographic analepsis and prolepsis are paths to detect the vague whispers resting in the ruins of the rural.

#### 4c. Deformity as Metonymy: The Useless Town

How does this photographic metonym stylistically affect Serés's text? Metonymy has already been connected to disability, most specifically to the inability to speak, known as aphasia. Dispelling the myth that a speech disorder implicates the patient with a complete loss of speech, Roman Jakobson explains that a severe contiguity disorder will destroy an individual's ability to fully propositionalize: "[W]ords endowed with purely grammatical functions, like conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, and articles, disappear first, giving rise to the so-called 'telegraphic style' ..." (106). The patient speaks in a hollowed-out form of communication, but is still able to produce a deformed style of language. Like a telegraph, the patient is able to functionally communicate, but aphasia has larger structuralist implications for the way literary texts work.<sup>102</sup> This telegraphic style connects back to what I described as Serés's photographic prose: a technique that utilizes pieces to gesture at a larger invisible whole. Put differently, each chapter, as an impression or etching, only discloses bits and pieces of a larger, fragmented whole. The peripheral, disabled community members come to represent a larger trend for the entire



community as site that absorbs the shockwaves, injuries and droughts connected with the modernization projects in mid twentieth-century Spain.

These photographic metonyms persist in the third chapter “Sentir. El banco de los inútiles (1965)” when the unemployed, handicapped and deformed take on this dehumanized, “useless” status of ruination. The chapter sketches out a bench where the unemployed of the town resided, offering a detailed reading of the injured and unemployed and how they interacted with the town. Situated on the *calle de la carretera*, the bench was a three meter piece of stone that served as “el refugio de los que ya no son” (22). Its occupants were the blind, the crippled, and the mentally handicapped, such as Manel de Xicoli, who had lost an arm from polio, Toni who had a speech impediment, another named Salobres lost his sight after falling from a horse and Quimeta whose limbs have been destroyed by varicose veins. Instantiating *sentir*, the narrator describes the difficult feelings he had when passing by the bench, emotions ranging from the comic to tragic. The narrator references laughing at the speech impediment of Toni out of a nervous fear, or feeling shame when his grandfather spoke to Salobres about crop rotations and weather. As the text notes, this site of inutility is marked by the possibility or “dangers” of injuries, scars and illnesses incurred by a rural lifestyle. Yet the injuries were not simply related to agricultural production but also to the Vapor textile factory, in which the use of older machinery caused a number of injuries, leaving many without fingers and arms or disfigured limbs. Just as the first chapter considered a blurry photograph of the narrator’s father, “El banco de los inútiles” is framed as a photograph because it serves as a metonym for the entire town. The character descriptions offer a detailed list of who these injured souls were and how they interacted with the town. Yet

*los inútiles*, as a portion of the community, gradually becomes a metonym for the entire town. Serés stretches out the disability trope to the entire town, explaining that the inutility of a few became the inutility of an entire community. Indeed, the town's single bench of crippled slowly took over the town.

Los abuelos se quedaron en el pueblo, y éste se fue convirtiendo en un inmenso banco de inútiles donde sólo vivían abuelos, y éste se fue convirtiendo en el reducto de todos los abuelos que se quedaban cuando los hijos y nietos emigraban a la ciudad: todo el pueblo se convirtió en un inmenso banco de inútiles donde tan sólo vivían abuelos y las cuatro familias que se dedicaron a cambio de terrazgo las mejores fincas de los que marchaban. (34)

As the younger generations of families left for factories and towns, the one bench of cripples becomes that of the crippled town. As stated above, these singular childhood impressions become a commentary about how families left for the city and what remains after this movement: objects and people without occupation except as placeholders for a lost past.

In part, the pertinent aspect of Jakobson's argument is its structuralist viewpoint, which allows for connections to be made between one social context and another. More importantly I contend that his extended use of deformity also applies rural literature. In other words, we must take the notion of deformity seriously in order to approach the deformed status of the rural and its relationship to modernity.

#### 4d. The Sociological Context of Rural Disappearance in Spain

What is the specific relationship between rural communities and modernity in the Spanish context? The disappearance of towns and farms across Spain shares a common

history with larger sociological shifts in Western Europe as traditionally agrarian communities began to migrate into the cities in the 1960s. In large part, the promise of new industrial jobs fueled demand for cheap labor from the former farmers and fishermen. However, in contrast to England, Germany or France, Spain's economy remained industrially underdeveloped, only creating major industrial strongholds in parts of the Basque Country and Catalonia. Moreover, as we shall soon see, many Franco-sponsored projects of rural "development," such as hydroelectric dams, in fact erased the presence of the former communities on these sites and re-wrote the landscape of the country on political and ecological levels.

In the 1970s, several North American and English anthropologists tracked how these social and material changes affected the wellbeing of Spain's rural communities. Most notably, Joseph Aceves and William Douglass published *The Changing Faces of Rural Spain* (1976), which surveys multiple geographical areas. In the late 1980s and early 1990s these issues were updated with respect to the increasingly global (im)migration issues (Pi-Sunyer; Lusignan). Most recently, Fernando Collantes has argued that the rural no longer entails an agricultural lifestyle, implying that the rural as it was once known has completely disappeared (76-7).

In the concluding piece of *Changing Faces*, Aceves points out that the insufficiencies and problems of rural life have long plagued Spain. Though his work has certainly aged, mainly citing data from the 1960s, it applies precisely to the moment that the town of *Els ventres de la terra* becomes "useless" and abandoned. From reports written at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella, citing "drought, disease and general misery" to the travel writing of the Generation of 1898, rural "life" has been

characterized more by death and austerity than productivity and exuberance (173). Basing his reflections on fieldwork in three *comarcas* (counties) in the Providence of Segovia, Aceves mobilizes the term *minifundio*, in contrast to the historically dominant *latifundio*, as the dominant mode of the day.<sup>103</sup> *Minifundio*, for Aceves, refers to the scattered small plots of land allotted to one farmer. In El Pinar, he notes that 360 farmers worked 1,320 hectares of land in 4,313 different plots. Coupled with this status, it is important to consider that the land was often of low fertility, irrigation was uncommon and most of the crops, such as cereal grains, were of low market value. As a whole then, Spain, as a country of small villages, finds its villages in the middle of the twentieth century in an impoverished, fragile state (174). To consider further this relationship, it is useful to layout the politics surrounding the all-powerful actant of water in agricultural societies.

#### 4e. Bottled-up Hydraulic Politics and Haunted Houses

One moniker Franco picked up during his reign was “Paco Rana” (Franky the Frog) because of his persistent campaign to re-invigorate the countryside through a series of public works projects, more often than not, involving hydro-electric dams and re-distributing the nations water supply. Geographer Erik Swyngedouw describes this project not simply as redistribution but rather as the birth of a violently transformative second nature.<sup>104</sup>

In the Spanish post-war context, the re-making of Spain’s hydrosocial landscape was part of an effort to create a socio-culturally, politically and physically integrated nationalist territorial scale and to obliterate earlier regionalist desires. Yet, this nationalistic socio-physical remaking of Spain was predicated upon

forging networked national and, in particular, transnational socio-political and economic arrangements. (11)

Franco takes up the discourse of rural regenerationism as a central aspect of reforming the Spanish nation, but abandons the radicality of this vision, which would have redistributed resources with more equity throughout the countryside and instead perpetuated oligarchic networks solely interested in serving the needs of Spain's metropolises.

Regenerationism entered the Spanish language in the nineteenth century as proposal to combat degenerationism. The latter was a medical term used to describe the Spanish political climate after the crisis of 1898, when Spain lost its remaining colonies to the United States. Francisco Silvela captures the problem of degeneration in his famous essay, "España sin pulso," published August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1898 in the Madrid newspaper *El Tiempo*:

Quisiéramos oír esas o parecidas palabras brotando de los labios del pueblo; pero no se oye nada; no se percibe agitación en los espíritus, ni movimiento en las gentes... España: dondequiera que se ponga el tacto, no se encuentra pulso. (1)

The physician analogy is meant to shock the reader, for Spain is not simply sick but moribund. For Silvela, all stripes of Spanish political identity are playing it too safe. *Any* political faction in Spain should come alive again and take risks, start a revolution or go to war with, say, North African countries. It was the Aragonese politician Joaquín Costa who gave the term regenerationism greater currency.<sup>105</sup> Costa framed part of his regenerationalist proposals through the need to redistribute water throughout the country,

which he identified as a process of de-Africanization and a consequent Europeanization of Spain.<sup>106</sup>

Under Franco, few of the dams were created for irrigation projects (38.2% of the dams created between 1964-1977) while the majority of the dams built (57.6%) in the same period were used for the production of energy (Swyngedouw 16). In the north, the continual industrial development in Catalonia and the Basque Country further invigorated this trend, diverting water supply away from many regions to satisfy this demand. This shift in resources also “diluted,” as Swyngedouw puts it, the demography in regions that had been opposed to Francoism during the war. Consequently, Franco’s instantiation of hydraulic politics was a disaster. It created greater inequality and deepened the polarization of the country. What we begin to see, then, is the socio-ecological context at work in *Els ventres de la terra*. Indeed, as the narrator of the novel states, the history of the town’s disappearance is a history of “el maltrato del agua.”

Franco’s hydraulic politics seep into Serés’s chapter “Beber. Cada una de las botellas de agua (1985).” In 1985, the narrator returns to gather twelve bottles before the final sale of his family’s old and long-empty house.

A la terraza, que está situada al otro lado del desván, se accede a través de una pequeña portezuela de madera punteada de arriba abajo por la carcoma. Una vez desatada la cuerda hay que empujar con fuerza para que la puerta rasque por encima el cuarto de circunferencia que con el paso del tiempo ha rayado en el suelo, y pasar con la cabeza gacha, más que por la altura, por las telarañas que cuelgan del techo. (82)

Household objects are covered with markers of time passed. Though “nests” of spider webs, dust and sheets of plastic cover the daily objects, they seem to “communicate” through these layers. There is, for instance, a machine for grinding meat, pitchers, jars and bottles used for canning fruits and vegetables, a stack of old western novels and a bottle of liquor the narrator is justifiably afraid to drink. They have, according to the narrator, a strange, unaccustomed tonality to them. He taps on a railing, which, though it has “the same sound,” he only hears it as an uncanny sound as if it were a broken bell. This uncanniness is, of course, often associated with fear and vertigo:

Me da reparo mirar por el alero, una sensación mezcla de vértigo y de miedo, difícil de describir, un escalofrío que quiere salirse del pecho, de las manos y que me empuja hacia dentro. (84)

The house almost concretely exhibits Freud’s discussion of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*): it is the familiar that seems most strange, causing the sensation of vertigo and dizziness the narrator references. In “On the Uncanny,” Freud teases out the semantic particulars of the word, likening it to a haunted house:

This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning. (15)

For Freud, psychoanalysis interprets this familiarity as an association to the mother’s womb, to a familiar body once inhabited to which one cannot return. “Un” as a prefix is a sign of “repression” of the memory of this place. In terms of the novel, this repression arises as an inability to return to a previous environment or *ventre*. The reader follows as

the narrator goes inside the site of his memories, creating a palpable yet absent recollection of what has gone before.

Being inside the site of memory gives faintly recognizable yet distant sensations. Take, for instance, this olfactory description:

El ambiente de una mezcla de humo de gasóleo y polvo, un olor que nunca olvidaré. Todavía quiero, aún más, todavía amo aquel olor, el polvo sólido y grasiento encima del bloque del motor, polvo mezcla de tierra de todos los campos que se cultivaban, de todos los caminos que salen y vuelven al pueblo, del polen de todos los árboles, y plantas de los montes, polvo endurecido por todos los calores y por todos los fríos de noviembre a marzo. (90)

These smells are indicative of a certain *terroir* that unavoidably comes from a particular social and ecological context of local trees and plants, soil and engine oil. Moreover, the house's uncanniness exhibits a peculiar sense of isolated co-existence. The narrator states this through his impression that "El desván mira el desván, los recuerdos miran los recuerdos, la casa mira la casa" (108). It is as if, even without their use value for humans, the objects persist on their own timescales.

These impressions are incidental to the narrator's purpose for making the trip, which is to find his mother's collection of bottles for transporting water from the nearby spring to the house. The bottles contain their own faint etchings of past experiences. Twelve glass bottles are wrapped in newspaper and six sit in two different wooden boxes. Their history began during his mother's work as a maid for a republican colonel who, in the last days of the Republic, offered compensation in objects instead of money because the Republic's currency, with the foreseeable victory of nationalist troops, would soon be



worthless. The colonel had acquired them from his trips throughout Europe: “Cada botella tiene una procedencia diferente, geografía grabada en vidrio que años después yo recordaría en las clases, en los mapas y los atlas” (96). The bottles come from places such as Brittany, Clermont-Ferrand, Scotland, and Perrier. The narrator’s favorite piece of the collection came from Eastern Europe:

La botella está labrada, grabada a mano con surcos que aún mantienen los bordes afilados. No sé que dice, identifico caracteres y símbolos pero no los he podido traducir nunca. (96)

The etchings, though never translated by the protagonist, always exhibited to him the ice native to Eastern Europe, his mother explained that the climate was so cold that even the wine would freeze. The bottles, then, are recordings of various histories occurring inside and outside of Spain; however, as indicated earlier, these histories are not readily disposed to interpretation and apprehension and instead remain at least partially withdrawn from our grasp.

The bottles also work as another metonym for the larger story of water under Francoism. The sight of the bottles conjures up a history that swells over the memory of selling his parents’ house and into the history of why they left the town in the first place: a water crisis. Though they always had running water in the house, the family used the bottles for fresh spring water, which was better for drinking. However, the construction of a local highway cutoff the aquifer “that gave life” (98). The highway led to a new gas station built directly over where the water reservoir resided (99). While the town had traditionally used wells and springs, these local developments of industry eventually made this practice impossible, creating, as the texts notes, the beginning of the end for the

town. The narrator reflects: “No le falla a nadie la memoria cuando aún hoy todo el mundo sitúa el declive del pueblo por la muerte de las fuentes, en el maltrato del agua” (99). Just as Verdaguer situates the end of Atlantis with a geologic event, the narrator reflects that the end of the town coincides with the re-organization of the rural terrain. Humans had, under Franco’s public works projects, geologically decimated landscapes, leaving towns without recourse except to immigrate. The so-called regenerationalist project, as carried out here, also contains the sinister side of erasing communities, turning this rural area into a human-induced Atlantis.

The most important aspect of Serés’s chapter is that it does not remain limited to the introspective observations about the water bottles, the house or even the town in which the house resides. Instead, each of these sites of memory become metonyms for the larger narrative of rural Spain. As an engineer, the narrator works in one the of dams created by the hydroelectric projects mentioned above. On the day he recieved a call with an offer on the house, the swamp created by the dam unexpectedly drained to an extremely low level, exposing what lied beneath: the town of Sallàs. This town, unlike the narrator’s own, did not fold because of a lack of water, but rather because its valley would be flooded in the name of progress. The “ghost town” exposed the “human disaster” covered over by the dictatorship’s pomp and celebration of the newly inaugurated dam. The narrator notes that, along with the rock formations dynamited to create the dam, those who did not accept the initial offer to leave the town, awoke in the middle of the night with dynamite planted in their homes, prompting their immediate flight. Water, in the case of Sallàs, “cleanses” these painful memories and buries the

wreckage in a swamp. Walking through the ruins of the ghost town, the narrator reflects that the water also has the function of conserving the town:

Hay quien dice que el agua pudre y corroe, pero el agua también ha conservado todos estos troncos y ramas, pensaba, y hasta algunas de las vigas se ven en buen estado. [...] La primera casa en la que entré mostraba un orden extraño, como si en realidad no hubiese sucedido nada, el mobiliario estaba completo, o al menos esto parecía. Las sillas, arrinconadas y puestas las unas encima de las otras, asiento contra asiento, alrededor del comedor. En medio, una mesa conservaba todavía un centro de cristal en el que quedaban residuos secos y diversos haces de líneas horizontales, marcas de los diferentes niveles del agua. (106)

In its wake, water left the uncannily preserved human settlements as well as piles of dead fish, slithering snakes and hopping frogs. Moreover, water, without “morals or memory” acts as a container, geologically burying different epochs of rural life. Such a burial urges us to again reconsider what Serés means when he states that a central challenge of writing a rural novel is telling a story about a place with no literature. The stories have to be excavated out of layers of dirt, sludge and rock. Significantly, this description is similar to Plato’s description of Atlantis shortly after the epigraph to this paper:

That is how the ocean in that region has come to be even now unnavigable and unexplorable, obstructed as it is by a layer of mud at a shallow depth, the residue of the island as it settled. (1233)

The narrator, now working for the dam, is in a privileged position to connect the history of Sallàs to the history of his own town, summed up in the phrase: “Lo que el agua nos

da, el agua nos quita” (113). The narrator makes the immediate connection between selling his own house and uncanniness Sallàs. He meditates that it is difficult to accept that, upon seeing the previously flooded houses, people used to live here. The same goes for his own house that he is about to sell. In both cases, the literary contemplation of these situations allows us to witness the structures that have erased and continue to erase many rural communities.

#### 4f. Conclusions: The Future of Atlantis

*Els ventres de la terra* works like the excavation of a former (geological) *Bildungsroman*, built of texts and materials long ago considered lost. The stories are less about the development of an individual and more about the attempt to return to a fractured reality surrounding the subject. Serés embarks on a journey of studying past niches that still seem to have a pertinence to the present.

What is the function of the Atlantis myth? While many literary projects have certainly done a nice job essentializing ruralism, the rural also might be seen as a set of fragmentary interests, specific to eco-political concerns in a given region. What the Atlantis myth reminds us of is that, though keeping in mind the territorial variation, there are features held in common by the hinterlands of modernity, which, if they have not already disappeared, are certainly on their way out ideologically and ontologically due to the geologic aftershocks of the Anthropocene. Wielding Atlantis as a torch searching for a lost world, then, becomes a way to piece through the debris of objects that still populate rural landscapes and construct narratives that speak to the clearly global concerns of human societies, as increasingly urban collectives, source their food and energy needs.

In contrast to what one might consider as a return to *costumbrismo* Serés's trilogy *Des femmes i marbles* explores the significant marks of a site has dissipated and faded into dust. The result is a fascinating look into how one might reformulate ruralism as a new, nonessentialized concept. Simultaneously, the texts also serve as a means to note the structural and thematic confluences between varying geographic locations that have either completely disappeared or have suffered from modern re-compositions of landscapes. These sites are, in my view, disparate pieces of a larger Atlantean puzzle that warrants our attention as means to better understand how the hinterland relates to contemporary urban life. In Serés, photography becomes a mechanism to survey the remainder of townscapes and landscapes and also explore temporally fragmented sketches of a larger untold story. His work not only returns to decimated rural landscapes after they have changed, mutated or decayed but also contextualizes them with respect to the urban. This connectivity places ruralism squarely within an ecological framework because it refuses to consider it as a completely isolated world, apart from larger political and cultural questions. If Serés's own work provides an answer to his question about writing about a place with no literature, it appears the answer lies in its careful attention to the arrangement of objects, whether indicative of childhood memories, the handicapped unemployed or the bottles his family filled with spring water. Through these objects, the rural becomes a site of previously invisible histories that still contain the etchings of the rise and fall of previous communities. It is also true that the "writing" of the family's history is not simply found in a genealogy, testimony, or collection of memoirs but rather in the objects of daily life.

## **Chapter Five: Reappearance**

Las casas antiguas tienen un pozo negro, hemos aprendido que las democracias tienen alcantarillas y los Estados en general tienen una fosa en algún lugar apartado para los residuos tóxicos. Galicia es la fosa donde están los residuos tóxicos resultantes de la extraña química que precipitó la democracia española.  
-Susó de Toro

### **5a. Introduction: Galician Cultural Studies and Ecology**

The renewed interest in contemporary Galician cultural studies has paid close attention to the diverse meanings of the term *galeguidade* (Galician-ness) within the politically and culturally pluralist climate of post-Franco Spain (Hooper 1-3). While many have contextualized Galician identity globally through the region's waves of emigration, literary innovations and popular culture, little work has been done to situate Galicia through the region's recent ecological crises caused, in large part, by its close geographic contact with the Atlantic Ocean and international shipping routes. Isabel Castro Vázquez has begun to consider ecology's importance in her *Reexistencias* (2007) on Galician author Manuel Rivas's ecological approach to language, bodies and environments in his work.<sup>107</sup> María Do Cebreiro Rábade Villar has also observed that several protest and cultural movements in Galicia have transformed nature into a productive political sphere.<sup>108</sup> Such approaches offer a new understanding of how local identity relates to the global networks of environmentalism. These ideas also connect to several major environmental events in recent Galician history, which, as we shall see, have been caused by a globalized economy and its inherent risks. In fact, there have been eight major ecological accidents in the region since the 1970s, including the mass dumping of nuclear waste and several oil spills.<sup>109</sup> The 2002 *Prestige* oil spill is the largest environmental disaster in Spanish history and also the largest maritime oil spill in

Western European history. As 125 tons of heavy petroleum washed ashore everyday after the *Prestige* tanker sank 275 kilometers off the coast of Galicia, multiple levels of the Spanish government refused to acknowledge the extent of the unfolding disaster, as we shall soon examine in greater detail.

What has become clear is that little has been done to prevent another disaster of equal or greater magnitude and that few will be held responsible for the environmental and economic devastation. At the time of writing, the ongoing court hearings of the trial of the ship's top-ranking crew members and the ex-Director of the Merchant Marines José Luis López-Sors is almost guaranteeing that none of the responsible parties will be held accountable. This chapter examines the Prestige crisis as a compendium of global forces of the petrol energy regime that debilitated Galicia's ecological health and ignited a major environmentalist movement in the region. This movement, known as *Nunca Más*, transformed many symbols of traditional Galician identity into statements of protest and, in so doing, demonstrate that local cultural identity can mobilize to protect local ecological systems. Our discussion begins with Isabel Coixet's documentary *Marea blanca* (2012), which contextualizes the cleanup effort and offers important insight into the social effects of the *Prestige* on Galicia and Europe. I then turn to Manuel Rivas's extensive ecologically committed essays and poetry and argue that his work re-articulates Galician and Iberian cultural identities in relationship to the fragility of ecosystems. In my view, both of these cultural objects contemplate the relationship between speech and silence as well as between the visible and the invisible layers of ecological violence. To varying degrees, these ecological avant-garde expressions constitute what will be considered as a *re-appearance* of Galician cultural identity as an ecologically conscious

collective of human and nonhuman voices, including the sea, its fauna and surrounding human communities.

Before advancing, it is useful to underscore several salient points in the evolution of Galician national identity. Despite its relatively subdued history of nationalist or separatist movements, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there have been many cultural revivals of Galician identity, beginning principally with the *Rexurdimento* (resurgence) work of Rosalía de Castro, Enríquez Curros and Eduardo Pondal in the nineteenth century.<sup>110</sup> Yet this nationalist resurgence often perpetuated many essentialized caricatures of the region. Lourenzo Fernández Prieto notes that *galeguismo*, or the ideological defense of Galician language and culture, actually fed into the image of Galicia as the land of peasants precisely because it reifies the rural as a culturally backward and unproductive space (Hooper 35). As we shall see, these rural images are still at work in Galician culture and have a pivotal role in the perception of the *Prestige* crisis.

There are several twentieth-century movements that embody *galeguismo*. *Xeración Nós* (“The Us Generation” 1920-36) began to consider Galicia politically and culturally as a nation in its own right. Using Celtic and Romantic sentiments often attached to Galicia, writers such as Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao, Vicente Risco and Ramón Otero Pedrayo distinguished between the Mediterranean soul and the Atlantic soul, basing the latter on the belief in *saudade* (a painful, nostalgic longing). This distinction introduced the uniquely Atlantic concepts of *pobo*, *alma* and *terra* (people, soul and land) into the debate about Galician nationality (Hooper 46-7). Each of these concepts emphasizes the rural place as an endless font of storytelling, in turn,



perpetuating a number of folkloric stereotypes as rural, backwards and culturally unproductive (Ibid). In the 1950s, the Galaxia group also perpetuated this folkloric literature but removed the political overtones of independence (37). However, as resistance grew against Franco, various authors again questioned the utility of this culture of backwardness as a viable politics and began to foment the idea of a culturally and politically autonomous Galicia (47).

Moving further back chronologically, Galicia was known as *Finis Terrae* (*fisterra*), a crossroads between land and sea since the Roman presence in Spain. Historically, its location has been a point of departure as much as a home. Indeed, immigration became a central aspect of Galician identity in the 1890s.<sup>111</sup> In their recent inaugural volume *Contemporary Galician Cultural Studies* (2011), Kirsty Hooper and Manuel Puga Moruxa observe that this geographical situation places Galicia in the middle of ongoing discussions about identity and globalization (Ibid 1). The area most affected by the spill, *Costa da Morta* (the Coast of Death), takes its name from its long history of rough seas and shipwrecks. Yet, despite its status as a major hub of maritime travel, the region was always considered backwards and underdeveloped. Its economy did remain undeveloped in comparison to the steel industry in the Basque Country or the textile industry in Catalonia.<sup>112</sup> Coupled with these economic considerations, Galicia was also recognized as an historical nationality in 1981, theoretically granting recognition of its unique culture and language. This designation, however, has recently received much criticism as a viable means to sustain Spain's culturally pluralist society. More recently, Spain's integration into the European Union has also advanced the recognition of Galicia as a culturally independent nation and its multiple UNESCO Heritage Sites.<sup>113</sup>

How does the *Prestige* case relate to re-aligning cultural identity in contemporary Galician Studies? Upon the advent of the spill, there were (and continue to be) two different narratives of the crisis: the government's response and the democratic response. These different narratives present drastically different visions of what Galicia's cultural patrimony should be.

On the one hand, there was the official response, alluded to above, of the right-wing Aznar and Fraga governments. On respective national and regional levels, both leaders chose to avoid, hide and obscure the profundity of the crisis. The government never used the words *marea negra* (oil spill). In fact, Spain's current Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy (at the time Deputy Prime Minister) officially denied that an oil spill had occurred and has never retracted the statement.<sup>114</sup> Instead of referring to spilled oil as spilled oil, Rajoy metaphorically described it as "hilillos de plastilina" ("little trails of clay"), in effect, verbally transforming a disaster into a minor incident (Moreno). Other public figures, such as the former Minister of Public Works Francisco Álvarez-Cascos, were simply absent. (Álvarez-Caso had gone hunting because he deemed his participation as "frivolous.") Furthermore, many larger media corporations and interest groups, most overtly TVE aided this denial by not airing footage of the coastlines as oil washed up in the *Costa da Morte*; the shadowy right-wing group *Manos Limpias* accused the protest movement of misusing public funds and embezzlement.<sup>115</sup> The subtext of this official narrative is one that precisely maintains a sense of normalcy; that is to say, it denies that Galicia's ecosystems and economy have been damaged by a human-induced disaster. While this denial is obviously a blunder against democratic transparency, the government's position also fails to highlight the slow violence that will continue to

unfold for decades after the spill. The impact of petroleum's toxicity on marine ecosystem unfolds at a much slower pace than the dramatic unfolding of the events leading up to the spill.<sup>116</sup>

As one might glean from Rajoy's use of metaphor, this narrative has a decisively literary component. In one essay dedicated to the *Prestige* crisis, Rivas refers to North American journalist Greg Palast's story from the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill about the "miracle barrel" (*A cuerpo* 268). Palast discovered that a "barrel" of clean water had been substituted for the contaminated water sampled from the spill site, rendering the test results clean when they should have shown oil contaminants. The purified water-text took the place of the contaminated one. In this way, "the facts" of the spill actively obstructed any revelation about the ecological state of marine life and local communities. Insofar as politicians did not feel obliged to resort to proof and instead simply denied the incident, there was not an exact parallel event to Palast's miracle barrel in Galicia. Yet Rivas contends that Galicians were *inside* of a miracle barrel. Imaginary clean beaches discursively replaced the real contaminated ones. The obvious effect of this narrative is the shrouding or silencing of facts. That is to say, the iconic pastoral image of a rural Galicia obscures the truth that its ecosystems and communities were in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis international shipping routes of the petrol industry. Furthermore, the persistence of the miracle barrel narrative did not dissipate even as petroleum washed up on the beaches of *Costa da Morte*.

There was a second democratic response by the people of Galicia, along with much support across Iberia, Europe and the world. Two days after the *Prestige* sank, the political coalition BNG (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*) and many intellectuals set up what

would be come the first meetings of *Nunca Más*.<sup>117</sup> Rivas himself sums up the spirit of the movement:

La sociedad civil reclama su derecho a ser ciudadanos, no meros votantes. El problema es que el PP teme a los ciudadanos. *Nunca Más* es un rechazo a esa concepción. (Lobo)

Beginning as a grass roots reaction to the oil spill and the awkwardly slow response by the PP government and international agencies, *Nunca Más* united people towards a greater awareness of the fragility of environments and surrounding communities. This globalized protest of the official silence sought to decry, denounce and cleanup large amounts of *chapapote* washing onto Galician shorelines.<sup>118</sup> This critical response became a way to recompose and reunite Galician identity within a fragile nexus within today's global economy. These two narratives of the *Prestige* case display opposing visions of Galicia and its ecology. The first narrative utilizes a reified pastoral image as means to disguise the disastrous effects of modernity. The second narrative understands Galicia's ecosystem as an interrelated mesh of connections to its cultural and economic production.<sup>119</sup>

Analytically, how are these two narratives of crisis to be approached? Such a dialogue requires a distinction in the types of risks and the crises they can produce. The phenomena of environmental disasters require an important distinction between what Anthony Giddens has described as "external" and "manufactured" risks. The external risk of disaster is "experienced as coming from the outside" of a given community (26). A hurricane, for instance, is perceived as "natural" or "external" because it is a possible outcome of living near a coastline. A plague is likewise viewed as a consequence of

coming into contact with contaminated animals or goods (or, for others, caused by divine intervention). No matter the exact source, external risk dictates that we cite the blame as stemming from outside of human communities. Conversely, manufactured risk originates from human activity. Giddens explains that recently, “we started worrying less about what nature can do to us, and more about what we have done to nature” (27). For example, on March 11, 2011 the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami triggered major equipment failures at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plants. As if the “external” disaster were not enough, the installation of nuclear facilities in such a location created “manufactured” risk far beyond what the force of a massive wave could do on its own. Indeed, the incurred damage to Fukushima Daiichi *entangled* different communities across the world as the nuclear contaminants spread.<sup>120</sup> This sort of entanglement is increasingly global in scale. Manufactured risks are not merely dangerous for one particular location, but rather constitute dangers for entire ecological networks on increasingly global scales. As Giddens himself points out, events such as hurricanes, plagues and tsunamis underscore the fact that these risk outcomes do not strictly affect nature or human communities, but rather the shared space of humans and nonhumans.

The *Prestige* incident qualifies as a discernible manufactured-risk situation. According to an official report made by the US-based Ship Structure Committee, the *Prestige* was a single hulled oil tanker damaged in rough seas (“Ship Structure”). After controversially being refused safe harbor in Spain, France and Portugal, the ship was towed toward open sea on November 13th, 2002 in the hopes of avoiding a spill near the Spanish coast (García-Olivares 537). On November 19th the craft split in two and sank about 275 km west of Vigo in international waters. Subsequently, an estimated 61,600

tons of oil spilled into the sea (eighty percent of the ship's 77,000 tons). In the end, over a hundred miles of Spanish, French and Portuguese coastlines were contaminated with highly toxic oil and an estimated cleanup cost of 2.5 billion Euros (the financial equivalent of the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska) (Garcia 19). Moreover, analysts have suggested that the spill cost the coastal economy about 771 million Euros (García-Olivares 533).

The ineptitude of the government's response also carries over into contemporaneous politics around cultural policies, created by Manuel Fraga and his ideology, what came to be known as *fraguismo*. From 1989 until 2005, the government of the Franco-era minister Manuel Fraga dominated the region's politics.<sup>121</sup> One goal of *fraguismo* was to support certain kinds of ideologically "neutral" cultural production, specifically avoiding any references to Galician nationalism. As soon as Fraga was elected as President of the Xunta of Galicia, he found himself challenged by, among others, the editors at the cultural magazine *Tempos novos*, who accused Fraga of a two-fold neutralization of Galician culture. On the one hand, *fraguismo* perpetuated what *Tempos novos* called *autocompracencia esencialista* (essentialist self-satisfaction), which represents rural lifestyle akin to what is described above through some forms of *galeguidade*. On the other hand, *autoodio* (self hate) emphasizes the importance of importing cosmopolitan art while ignoring local cultural production (Hooper 193).<sup>122</sup> María Reimóndez writes:

The image of Galician heritage promoted abroad constantly used imaginary landscapes, which can be seen in the *hórreos* ("traditional grain stores"), *carballos* ("oak trees") and *brétemas* ("mists") featured in the different publicity

campaigns to foster tourism in Galicia. (Ibid 196)

Reimóndez echoes the concern voiced at the time of the project's proposal: its *galeguidade* did not advance an international consciousness that Galicia was (and is) an autonomous community within Spain. On the contrary, its presentation of Galicia was a perpetuation of Spain's rural backwoods open for tourism, but devoid of its own cultural space. Reimóndez concludes her discussion of *fraguismo* arguing that Galicia needs cultural policy that supports a vibrant artistic creation, underscoring that Galicia itself is a site of cultural *production* not *consumption* (Ibid 200).

The conservative view of cultural patrimony is currently under question in Galicia's age of ecological awareness. The cultural resistance against reified culture and politics grew exponentially during the *Nunca Más* protests after the *Prestige* oil spill in 2002. Indeed, this backlash against Fraga's government marked the beginning of the end for his regime, as he lost power in 2005.

The government and *Nunca Más* obviously approached the manufactured risks in different ways. While the government remained silent on these issues, *Nunca Más* chose to give voice to the risks and fallout related to the *Prestige* incident. Consequently, one narrative renders invisible the environmental damage while the other gives visibility to these issues. This variation highlights two different kinds of silences that I will refer to throughout this chapter. In a recent interview, Rivas cites Rosalía de Castro's distinction between *silencio mudo* and *silencio fértil* as a way to understand the importance of silence in his work. A mute silence is the denial or censorship of stories by forces of an authoritarian nepotism while *silencio fértil* becomes a productive space in which democratic debate can occur.<sup>123</sup> A mute silence occurs in a discursive vacuum, denying

any response to it while a fertile silence becomes a generative space for discourse. Rivas writes: “Estoy de acuerdo en que la literatura, esa boca que intenta decir lo indecible, y esa mirada que hace visible lo invisible es más necesaria que nunca” (“Entrevista”). Literature’s task, for Rivas, responds to Goya’s paradoxical etchings, which captured what one cannot see and expressed what one cannot not say.<sup>124</sup> With respect to the two discourses of the *Prestige*, it becomes clear that the government’s “story” is largely composed of mute silence, denying facts and refusing to act. As Rivas has noted in a recent report released by Greenpeace (2012), this muted silence left a vacuum in public discourse, which eventually helped create the *Nunca Más* movement (“Otro Prestige” 35). *Nunca Más*, then transformed the mute silence of the official discourse into a democratic space. Coixet and Rivas will help expose how art can transform a destructive silence into a productive force for understanding how this environmental protest movement transformed Galician cultural identity.

At the time of writing, a Spanish trial is still underway in the attempt to hold those responsible to account for the unfolding of the accident. Due to the complexity of international standards, the Spanish courts have only taken to trial four individuals. The trial has dragged on for a total of ten years: eight years of investigation and an additional two years mired in the legal complexities of international law. Moreover, the trial has become comically tragic, with, for example, media attention focused on the ship’s ailing 77-year old Greek captain, Apóstolos Mangouras, who not only requires translation services, but also is hard of hearing (or feigns it, anyway) (Ordaz). The trial has also brought to light many contradictions inherent in the case, with disputing accounts of how damaged the ship was before it entered rough seas and why the ship was refused safe



harbor. Testimonies from the likes of ex-Director the Merchant Marines José Luis López-Sors, Mangouras and the ship's chief of machinery and Nikolaos Argyropoulos all seem to contradict one another and assign blame elsewhere (Obelleiro). Added to this, a fourth plaintiff in the trial, Pilipino First Officer Ireneo Maloto, has not made an appearance in court and seems to have disappeared entirely. In terms of policy, it appears that the trial and the politics surrounding the case will only affect few, if any, changes to international standards for shipping petroleum.<sup>125</sup>

This risk-turned-disaster situation altered the perception of Galician landscapes in a way similar to Rábade Villar's cultural identity project in her article "Spectres of the Nation: Forms of Resistance to Literary Nationalism." Beginning her essay citing Samuel Beckett's phrase "unspeakable homes," Rábade Villar argues that Galicia, as a peripheral cultural identity, should be a project of rendering what is unspeakable into the speakable because it should ally itself with those "who have received the greatest injustice" (Rábade Villar).<sup>126</sup> Cultural and linguistic identity, then, precludes any unified and stable project, based on a codified linguistic foundation. She notes that instead of understanding Galicia as a codified Heideggerian house of language, as did older forms of *Galeguismo*, it is more productive to analyze the cracks or fissures in the cultural project because such analytical attention allows for a greater focus on the heterogeneity and openness of Galician identity. In other words, *Galeguismo* should concern itself with those that have no voice within the nepotism of *silencio mudo*. Indeed, considering the unspeakable home or, the *oikos*, of Galicia in a moment of environmental disaster draws our attention to these fissures and our exposure to them. In other words, the political problems plaguing Fraga's Galicia came to light during the *Prestige* crisis. Nationalism, then,

becomes less of a singular unity and more about “distance, disaffection and exile.” These terms, according to Rábade Villar, ally cultural identity with “residual” forms of subjectivity, a category that I will now extend to nonhuman and nonlife forms of being: the creatures and objects that compose Galicia’s maritime culture and ecosystems.<sup>127</sup> Juxtaposing the two narratives of the *Prestige* not only exposes the ecological fissures in the official narrative, but also offers a new articulation of Galician identity as a diverse ecological collective of human and nonhuman elements. Coixet and Rivas allow us to consider cultural strategies and styles that are able to grasp the scope and impact of the *Prestige* crisis and how culture can contribute to a greater ecological awareness in Galicia and around the world.

5b. Isabel Coixet’s *Marea blanca*: The Necro-pastoral Documentary

The Spanish Brewery Company Coronita started a campaign to save European beaches in 2009. The “Save the Beach” initiative has two components. First, the campaign works to create awareness about why beaches need to be preserved and how different European initiatives have preserved them. The organization boasts support from a variety of musicians, actors and other celebrities. Save the Beach’s pedagogical desires are enhanced by a variety of events, varying from fashion shows, showcasing studies by Alexandra Cousteau (the daughter of Jacques Cousteau), to building hotels entirely out of trash in Rome and Madrid and, what concerns us here, the sponsorship of Catalan director Isabel Coixet’s (1960) documentary about the *Prestige* cleanup in 2002.

Coixet’s *Marea blanca* (2012) is one example of a Save the Beach showcase event. According to Coronita’s “Save the Beach” website *Marea blanca* is an homage to

the volunteers who helped clean up the Galician beaches shortly after the 2002 oil spill.

The website's press release explains:

Hoy, diez años después, la prestigiosa cineasta Isabel Coixet nos cuenta en un documental esta heroica tarea a través de las vivencias y anécdotas de algunos de los que estuvieron allí.

Pero Marea Blanca es mucho más que un documental: es una plataforma creada por Save the Beach para rendir homenaje a todos los voluntarios. En ella, se expondrá material gráfico y visual que recuerda cómo quedó la costa tras el desastre y cómo gracias a todos estos héroes anónimos, luce en la actualidad.

("Marea Blanca")

The blurb's use of the words "heroic" and "hero" speak directly to the intent of the film: an ode to the human drama occurring around the spill. The title itself, *Marea blanca*, offers a contraposition to the Spanish term for oil spill (*marea negra*). This chiaroscuro of white and black alludes to the numerous pictures of volunteers dressed in white cleanup suits, combating the black oil. This contrast between light and dark, between pristine and polluted is a constant motif of the film, most strikingly in Coixet's use of 2002 footage juxtaposed to the more recent original shots taken on the *Costa da Morte*. While the intent of such a contrast may have simply been to point out the importance of human action in response to the crisis, I will survey a few examples from the film to draw out the concept of the necro-pastoral, a style that ultimately diagnoses the film's ambivalent political position.

At its most lyrical moments, the documentary could be seen as slipping into pastoral maritime imagery, similar to the government's narrative of the spill: a flat-out

denial of the damage done. Yet Coixet's use of these scenes is not to negate the environmental devastation, but rather to draw out the contrast of the environmental state since the aftermath of the *Prestige*. As stated in the press release about the film, the currently clean beachfronts are a testament to the collective cleanup effort of *marea blanca*. This spatial contraposition between the current state of Galicia's beaches and their devastation in November 2002 also creates a sense of what poet Joyelle McSweeney has described as the necro-pastoral: a poetics that renders sinister landscapes typically represented as pristine in the western landscape imaginary. The necro-pastoral draws out abject objects typically expelled from pastoral landscapes ("Normal Love"). In a sampling of the film's many interviews, each of the protagonists exhibits what we might consider to be the psychological and physical effects of the necro-pastoral inherent to this genre because of the space of speech and silence in each interview. As we shall see, some volunteers spoke of a verbal asphyxia while others mourned over the devastation.

The film begins with an homage to the sea by Galician poet Anton Reixa. The poem "Mar de mans" is recited off screen as the camera lyrically pans across various iconic seascapes of Galicia. Reixa's nautical ode is accompanied by the diegetic sounds of seagulls and peaceful waves and an extradiegetic guitar ballad, creating a somber yet nostalgic pastoral scene of a Galician seascape. The first image is a tracking shot moving from the sea towards the land. Moments after these establishing shots, the film cuts to an interior shot of the first interview with fisherman Nacho Castro narrating the disaster. Castro describes a peaceful morning akin to the opening images, but notes that the air was contaminated by the smell of oil, which gave way to his realization that something grave was unfolding.

As Castro narrates the final days of the *Prestige*, the scene cuts to the ship's hull silently vanishing into the sea, a cinematic trope calling to mind Riechmann's meanwhile, insofar as the film juxtaposes pastoral seascape shots to the sinking ship out at sea. Coixet's interstitial meanwhile of the sinking ship augments the overtone of fragility in Castro's narrative. As viewers, we gain a sense of Galicia's vulnerability to such an accident as it was (and is) situated close to international shipping routes, including the passage of oil tankers. After this interlude, Castro then emotionally describes the first appearances of *chapapote* on the beaches, images defying the pastoral images introducing the film. His words are accompanied by scenes of blackened waves rolling onto beaches, contaminated seafood and the first scenes of the film's *marea blanca*, the volunteers from all over Spain, Europe and the world.<sup>128</sup> These introductory scenes set the pace for the entire film, which shifts between lyrical pastoral scenes, interviews with volunteers and locals, and interweaving montage from the time of the spill.

First, however, it is important to explore the dominant optimistic side of the documentary: the hope that each speaker wants to convey in his or her interviews. As mentioned, the film centers on the selfless actions of the volunteers, who gave up vacation, work and home life to travel and cooperate with the democratic cleanup effort. This effort of solidarity, in sum, yielded unexpected and positive outcomes for the participants. While the film's narrative certainly vacillates between moments of blinding sadness and inspiration, the central message is optimistic, citing the fact that so many people were able to unite around the cause of cleaning up Galicia's toxic beaches. For example, volunteer Soledad Méndez from Extremadura speaks of feeling the imperative to work on the crisis as soon as she heard the news. Although she cites the atrocity of the

disaster and the difficult work of the cleanup, what she remembers most is the overwhelming solidarity at work in the volunteer groups. Her own story concludes with an unexpected pregnancy, a discovery that helped her decide to stay in Galicia and name her child Alegría Finisterra. As of the filming, Méndez remains in Galicia and identifies the place as her home.

Likewise, German Sven Schwebsch also remains in the coastal area, cleaning up trash from beaches and working to raise greater environmental awareness on a local level. Schwebsch's interview emphasizes an unexpected hope generated out of the solidarity action: "los voluntarios todos venían con el espíritu de 'yo quiero hacer. Yo quiero ayudar.'" The German volunteer remarks that if we googled *chapapote* the search results will not only yield images of beaches awash in petroleum but also photos of volunteers dressed in their white safety gear. Schwebsch's observation implies that the *marea blanca* washed out the *marea negra*, making visible the democratic triumph in the midst of tremendous ecological loss. Such language produces a kind of Manichaeism of dueling forces between good humans and evil petroleum, a dominant message of the documentary. If we think back to the *Prestige's* two narratives, *Marea blanca's* position becomes ambiguous because it highlights the ecological atrocity but fails to explore the political and economic risks that caused the disaster.

There is, however, a more subtle counternarrative to this tale of binaries, which speaks more to the toxic inertia and difficulties of cleaning up over 61,000 tons of oil. Other volunteers, such as environmentalist Núria Blanco (Barcelona) and volunteer Rustam Lembergenov (Kazakhstan) either explicitly or implicitly describe the event through kinds of linguistic asphyxia: a toxically imposed silence from working with such

a substance as petroleum.<sup>129</sup> Blanco's description coincides with many testimonials of cleanup volunteers at oil spill sites: the oil's toxicity not only overwhelms the environment but is also experienced viscerally on a subjective level. She explains that upon seeing the devastation she cried.<sup>130</sup> Blanco describes her emotional reaction through the inability to speak in the face of the disaster. Her silence is indicative of what Manuel Rivas described above as the muted silence of nepotism, that is, a silence imposed by an outside force that prohibits verbal articulation. In this case, nepotism is the overwhelming toxicity of petroleum, affecting human immune systems and emotions as much as it does ecological systems. As we shall soon explore in greater depth, her muted reaction is an example of the necro-pastoral: an emotional response realizing that the picture-perfect pastoral has become an ecological necropolis.

In an exterior shot next to the sea, Lembergenov's silence occurs spontaneously within the frame of the film. As he begins naming individuals he worked with on the beach, the list stops as he begins to cry. The sudden caesura to his story presents itself as a more optimistic silence because Lembergenov has not been silenced by a petro-toxicity, but rather by a heartfelt exuberance of remembering the solidarity of *marea blanca*. This silence is what Rivas described as *silencio amigo* (a fecund silence), insofar as it generates a narrative of collective action. Coixet also seems to note the importance of Lembergenov's tapered conclusion because the shot lingers like an ellipsis on the interviewee before cutting to the next interview.

What Coixet beautifully captures is the *Prestige* aftermath as an instance of shared ecological fragility felt across Spain, Europe and internationally.<sup>131</sup> As the oil washed onto the iconic beaches of the *Costa da Morte*, the natural backdrop of local

identity transformed into what has been described as a nightmare of dying birds and blackened rocks. Coixet emphasizes this transformation through a cinematic splicing of pristine seascapes and devastated coastlines. In contrast, the government's response leaves these sinister aspects buried underneath the edifice of verdant pastures. In this case, it is up to the spectator to decipher that there is something sinister beneath the pastoral. The documentary, in contrast, wants to expose the damage done. This is the technique of the necro-pastoral, which exposes the peaceful as the sinister or the verdant as the polluted. In a blog post entitled "Necropastoral, or, Normal Love," Joyelle McSweeney writes:

The Pastoral, like the occult, has always been a fraud, a counterfeit, an invention, an anachronism. However, as with the occult, and as with Art itself, the fraudulence of the pastoral is in direct proportion to its uncanny powers. ("Normal Love")

Instead of glorying the problematic mechanisms of the global economy, the pastoral genre seeks to obscure them by, for instance, refusing to address the presence of petroleum on Galician beaches. What is the "power" or effect of this obfuscation? On the one hand, the pastoral has the capacity to bury and obscure the physical and psychological wounds of an ecological trauma. Nature becomes ideologically mobilized as a weapon of disguise and deceit, created in order to avoid or divert blame for the fallout. The pastoral, then, minimizes the perception that *we* manufactured the risks that created the disaster. This utilization of the pastoral deemphasizes the idyllic image's relationship to actual landscapes and communities. In the *Prestige* case, the government's denial of the oil spill, never using the words *marea negra*, is an attempt to bury the



necropolis within the pastoral, the great womb of Mother Nature. Pastoral here indicates a desire to reassert a pristine, unblemished and unchanging nature *even in the midst of modernity's collapse*.

In contrast, the ecological avant-garde wants to emphasize the dualist tension at work in necro-pastoral poetics. Instead of a surreptitious burial of ecological devastation, eco-art exhumes and documents past traumas. In many ways, one can argue that the necro-pastoral takes literally the psychoanalytic language of Kristeva on the abject.<sup>132</sup>

McSweeney writes:

The necropastoral certainly shares many features with the abject, but what's important about the necropastoral is that it is specifically ecological in its concern. It moves from Kristeva's mapping of a figurative, psychoanalytic landscape all oriented around the self to the literal landscape and the body as porous to that landscape and to the cultural landscape and to other bodies, living, dead, ghostly, human, inhuman, artificial; in some (but not all) ways it's the model of the psychoanalytic i.e. interior landscape of the abject turned painfully inside out, and shedding the psychoanalytic content itself.... There's something more massy, assembled, necrotic, material, decomposing, and literally field-like about this way of thinking. ("The Abject and Zurita")

In contrast to the supposedly "neutral" ideology of the pastoral, this kind of work emphasizes what remains buried underneath the visible surface of landscapes. In contrast, what Coixet's necro-pastoral underscores is the sensation that the idyllic pastures and seascapes of Galicia are in fact the space of an ideological construct, a means to hide the manufactured risk inherent in global capitalism. This documentary of oppositions has a

methodology of extraction; it operates between the visible traumas in 2002 and the invisible wounds almost ten years later. Indeed, the various stories and recollections of the documentary's interlocutors convey the emotion and environmental wounds from the spill.

Coixet, however, does not take up the task of explaining the causes of the devastation. In *Marea blanca*, the crisis simply occurred. It seems enough to acknowledge the fact that the *Prestige* sank and eventually leaked much of the oil within its hull. The trouble is that, even if the documentary does show devastating scenes of blackened beaches and physically and emotionally exhausted volunteers, it makes no effort to politically and economically situate the spill in the cultural climate of Galicia in 2002. In this way, the cinematic scope of *Marea blanca* does not engage in a meaningful discussion about how we might avoid such catastrophes in the future. In fact, the documentary seems to assume that *such catastrophes will always have already occurred*, that "Save the Beach" initiatives will also be needed as corrective for past human mistakes and, in some cases, atrocities. Coixet's necro-pastoral style, then, is about exposing the burial sites of past mistakes. Concordantly, "saving beaches" is more about cleaning them up rather than preventing their contamination in the first place. In this sense, if considered through Rábade Villar's "speakable homes," Coixet begins to give voice to the environmental devastation but does not provide a meaningful way to integrate the exposed cracks and fissures into a political or cultural project.

The idea of ecological prevention leaves us in need of new tools to read the significance of the *Prestige* crisis. These tools are conceptually political in nature and point to something that is missing from the narrative of the film: the political sides of the

*Nunca Más* movement which have worked to avoid such crises in the future. (In fact, the only use of the words “*Nunca Más*” in the documentary is in one verse of Reixa’s poem.) Without this discussion, ecological responses always seem relegated to reactions to a crisis that has already occurred and fail to function as practices to avoid the repetition of past accidents. In other words, we need to address our manufactured risks and their impact on local communities. As we shall see in Rivas’s writing, these practices lead to the re-appearance of cultural identity as a fragile composition of human and nonhuman voices, which responds and resists such calamity and violence in the future.

### 5c. Hartismo as a Form of Avant-garde Protest Art

Manuel Rivas (1957) is a preeminent Galician novelist, poet and journalist. Though he is a major representative of literature published in Galician, he also writes regularly for the Spanish-speaking newspaper *El País*. His work has received international recognition, with two film adaptations of the Spanish Civil War novel *El lápiz del carpintero* (1998) and the short story collection *¿Qué me quieres, amor?* (1995), which includes “La lengua de las mariposas,” a story later turned into an internationally successful film. He was also a founding member in Green Peace España and a central voice of the *Nunca Más* movement.

While Coixet’s film is unable or unwilling to discuss the political and environmental ramifications around the *Nunca Más* uprising, Rivas has published many essays on the subject. For Rivas, this democratic movement not only united a diverse group of interests and ideologies, but also responds to nonhuman cries for help. Such ecological concern, I find, also carries over into his fiction and poetry.<sup>133</sup> Rivas attributes the first cry of *Nunca Más* to the sea itself (“A cuerpo” 254). His claim suggests that

ecological mobilization certainly involves nonhuman alliances just as much as it involves human collaboration. *Nunca Más*, then, galvanizes Galicia's human and nonhuman inhabitants in a bid to re-evaluate the region's local identity in the midst of a crisis truly brought on by the global forces surrounding the *Prestige*. I will explore how this insight further augments Coixet's necro-pastoral through an exploration of petro-melancholia, which not only underscores the fragility of ecological systems, but also explores the root causes in modernity that cause disasters such as the *Prestige*.

I indicated above that there were two competing narratives of what happened in the *Prestige* case. On the one hand, many forces quickly mobilized to cover up and obscure the impact of the spill, generating a narrative that Rivas describes as "the miracle barrel." Meanwhile, the democratic surge of *Nunca Más* filled in this vacuum of public discourse and united in the absence of a governmental response. In this way, the protest movement transformed the government's imposed "mute silence" into a fecund silence that begged for a voice in public discourse. *Nunca Más* became the space for communicating the screaming voices of the human and nonhuman collective. In order to evaluate this movement, it is important to first examine the flux of speech and silence at work in Rivas's "viaje de periodismo indie," in *A cuerpo abierto* (2008), which develops a "des-lectura" and allows for a critique of these facts and fictions. Rivas's "un-reading" (*des-lectura*) of the facts becomes means to understand how *Nunca Más* re-formulated Galician culture as a response to ecological crisis.

Rivas's *A cuerpo abierto* is a compiled text based on different newspaper columns written in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There are at least two ways of reading the work. On the one hand, this compilation might be dealt with simply as a compendium of

nonfiction opinion pieces. Reading these texts in one place allows us to follow a trajectory of his thought. Yet the text is not arranged chronologically; if we view it thematically, the content is almost sporadic, jumping back and forth to a series of interconnected themes. It rapidly shifts through a set of postures on contemporary Spanish culture and politics from the debate about historical memory to Spain's involvement in the American-led Iraq War and a sundry of environmental issues. The text is divided into the following sections: "La mirada indie," "La amnesia retrógrada," "La revolución del mar," and "Re-existencias," each entirely composed of these short fragments, ranging from half a page seven pages. What ties these sporadic themes together is the attitude of each section. The first section, "La mirada indie," encourages a "des-lectura" (an unreading) of a hypothetical apocalypse ("el Estado de Apocalipsis Permanente") after a fictitious presidential win of the conservative politician Mariano Rajoy in 2004. This ironic posture de-naturalizes the genre of journalism as a collection of facts and encourages the reader to slow down and question the reading of these "facts." Speech slows down to allow the reader to reflect on what it *does not say*. The second set of texts deals with a "retrograde amnesia," which wants to denounce a collective forgetting of the horrific events of the twentieth century, in Spain's particular case: the atrocities committed under Francoism. Part III, what concerns us here, is entitled "La revolución del mar." This short set of essays is an interconnected reflection piece on increased environmental awareness in Spain before and after the 2002 *Prestige* oil spill. Part IV is a short set of essays called "Re-existencias" that deals with the future of politics and culture in Spain. Rivas's injection of fiction into these journalistic texts urges ecological re-consideration after this crisis, suggesting that *Nunca Más* is not simply an

inflammatory reaction, but rather a different type of politics sensitive to ecological fragility of human and nonhuman systems. Though the third section predominantly deals with *Nunca Más*, Rivas also works to connect this event to other environmental issues in the region, such as the dumping of nuclear waste in the Atlantic Ocean and the Urquiola oil spill of 1976.

If Rivas's irony denaturalizes the "journalistic integrity" of these pieces through fictionalizing historic events, how are we to read them? To understand the significance of this turn towards fiction, it is important to underscore the use of irony in these texts. The meta-manifesto "Estamos hartos," that appears in Part I "La mirada *indie*, helps explain this sort of irony. Rivas exclaims:

Ya era hora de que estallara una nueva vanguardia. [...] «¡Estoy harto de Picasso!», proclama Antonio López. Y al día siguiente, Francisco Ayala va todavía más allá: «¡Estoy harto de Francisco Ayala!». Así se empiezan los auténticos manifiestos.... (37)

This "*nueva vanguardia*" is *hartismo*: *un hartazgo artístico* (an artistic satiety). As we observed in chapter two's discussion of Sabadell Artiga's *Manifest en contra de paisatge*, manifestos often begin with negations, setting apart new work from the old, the energetic from the tired and spent. Rivas claims that *hartismo* is not simply a new artistic form but also a collective discontent about speech and silence in contemporary political discourse. Why? There is an assumption here that contemporary discourse suffers from excessive hyperactivity. Due to the velocity, volume and complexity of information in a global society, it has become more difficult to synthesize raw data and construct narratives. Truth, however, if it is to be a part of these discourses, must be built slowly and

paradoxically, to contain fictions that point to the real uses of denial and mendacity at work in political systems (such as the Spanish government's denial of the spill).

*Hartismo*, then, pinpoints the crux of what Rivas considers to be avant-garde protest pieces, pointing to truths often missed in political discourse. Rivas writes that “El *hartismo* es la verdad abriéndose paso laboriosamente en una realidad empachada” (Ibid).

The adverb “laboriosamente” is a key insight into the irony of *hartismo*. It is a proclamation about the imperative to slow down our observations and to gaze into the features, structures and disasters of what Rob Nixon has called slow violence: invisible and silent destruction of landscapes often occurring on the peripheries of nation-states or other global actors.<sup>134</sup> It is less about the supposedly cathartic or graphic kinds of violence often represented in the media and more about ecological absorption and decay, inside, outside and around human communities. *Hartista* irony, then, slows down narratives to contest what we consider to be the factual status quo.

Rivas underscores this kind of slow and silent decimation. His writing suggests that our politics of truth is saturated with lies and noise; our landscapes are decaying from ecological corruption; the planetary atmosphere thickens with carbon dioxide. These ambient metaphors are not easily detectible in daily speech because they are background noise to our everyday activity of assumed facts. *Hartismo* moves against this velocity, impatience and inflation of “facts” and presses us to observe how this slow, silent violence affects ecosystems and communities. It encourages us to look into the spatial backdrops of our real and imagined communities and begins to construct new narratives based on what has been buried in material and discursive sludge. In this way, *hartismo* is an ironic manifesto asking us to slow down our reading in a globalized world because

hyperconsciouness composes a reality that is *empachada*—it is all stopped up and impeded.

For Rivas, the experimental irony of *hartismo* was at work in the way that the *Nunca Más* protests transformed everyday iconic objects connected to Galician identity. Indeed, *hartismo* gives us two ways to read the narrative of *Nunca Más*. First, *hartismo* is a literary diagnosis of the popular sentiment at the time of the spill, which was not only fed up by the disaster itself but also by an overtone of political malaise with the *Partido Popular*'s zombie-like Galician President Fraga, a Franco era politician serving in 2002 as the president of the *Xunta de Galicia*. Second, *hartismo* presses us to consider the “facts” and “fictions” spewing out of the mouth, that is, the hull of the *Prestige*. In other words, Rivas presses us not only to look at the hope and disillusionment of the volunteers cleaning up the spilled oil, but also to the global mechanisms that helped produce the spill and the political mechanisms that tried to cover up the ecological fallout.

In this way, *hartismo* operates in an opposing manner to the journalistic process of catchy headlines and short and often misleading stories. And there is much need for pause. One aspect of ecological crises such as the *Prestige* spill or the BP Macondo blowout in the Gulf of Mexico is the fast-paced narrative surrounding the event of the crisis. For instance, throughout the BP disaster in 2010, there was an inundation of remedies and solutions in the media. Words like “kill switch” or “kill mud” became main characters in a silent drama unfolding on a live stream broadcast from more than 35,000 feet underwater. Yet below this drama is a myriad of losses with deaths of birds and fish and sea turtles in addition to its impacts on human economies. Rivas captures this perfectly with the phrase *corazón chapapoteado* (the petro-melancholic heart), which



conveys the relational sense between the internal and external wounds caused by the crisis (260).

Ecological slow violence produces what Stephanie LeMenager has called petro-melancholia: a critical attitude toward modernity after the realization that it is failing. *Hartismo* wants to slow down the narrative of the *Prestige* oil spill and help us reflect on the ecological toll of the crisis, what its causes are and how we might avoid such crises in the future. The prescience of petro-melancholia requires an examination of the invisible and often silent structures and mechanisms at work in today's global economy. Several parallels between the *Prestige* case and the BP oil spill in 2010 become instructive on this point. Much like Galicia's case, the US Gulf Coast and more generally the southern United States has remained underdeveloped when compared to its northern counterpart. Modernity, for a state like Louisiana, has largely consisted of a patronage system with big oil companies and an acceptance of the health risks associated with large-scale oil refining operations.<sup>135</sup> Writing on Hurricane Katrina and the BP blowout of 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico, LeManager argues that environmental consciousness and activism display a melancholia concerning the "industrial-era infrastructures" that are ultimately destructive to human and nonhuman ecosystems. She writes:

We learn from these two events on the Gulf Coast of the southern United States not only that modernity and ecology are entangled objects, to paraphrase Bruno Latour, but also that the melancholia for a given Nature which has supposedly characterized modern environmentalism might be eclipsed, in the twenty-first century by an unresolvable grieving of modernity itself, as it begins to fail. (27)

Running parallel to the mourning of a damaged nature of the necro-pastoral, LeMenager contends that new forms of environmentalism also mourn the failures of modernity in relationship to the machinery of a global economy. In this sense, petro-melancholia is not only the mourning of environmental violence but also a grieving due to the impacts of modernity's inherently manufactured risks. In Galicia's case, petro-melancholia embodies what Rábade Villar described above as disaffection, which begins the examination and protest of the causes of the crisis.

What is most striking about the Galician case is where this melancholia and dissent led. In sum, *Nunca Más* was composed of over 300 labor, cultural, and civil organizations and, at certain peak points, over 250,000 protesters ("A cuerpo abierto" 255). Yet, the movement also has its nonhuman actants.<sup>136</sup> As Rivas points out in *A cuerpo abierto*, it is true that this movement was born out of a union of people, but poetically, it was born from a call of the sea itself. His claim suggests that human mobilization certainly involves nonhuman alliances, many of which were "typical" symbols of Galician identity, such as umbrellas, bagpipes, conch shells and suitcases. As we will later discuss, these Galician cultural objects become symbols of defiant protest in the *Nunca Más* movement. On the other hand, the immediate and systemic causes of the spill also become visible through an interrogation with more threatening objects involved such as the ship itself.

The *Prestige* itself is a perfect example of a globalized risk object turned accident and ecological crisis. The 26-year-old ship was built by Hitachi Shipbuilding and Engineering in Japan and sailed under a Bahamas flag.<sup>137</sup> It was registered in the port of Nassau and owned by a Liberian cooperation (Mare Shipping), managed by the Greek

company Universe Maritime and insured by the London Steamship Owner's Mutual Insurance. Attached to the narration of these facts is the enigmatic claim that the cause of the initial damage is not known, nor is it likely to be known because the *Prestige* is submerged in two miles of water ("Ship Structure"). Yet the Ship Structure Committee report suggests that the initial flooding may have been due to "fatigue of welded plates" or "sustained side shell damage." The ship, however, was perfectly within industry norms and should not be conceived as a rogue object or a limit case. Instead, the *Prestige* should be considered risky insofar as it is as a typical, everyday object. While such objects typically remain invisible and silent, occasionally they speak through their unstable aspects. What this spill reveals is the dark side of these everyday risk objects and our intimacy to them. Bruno Latour describes these risk objects as entangled because they surround us to such an extent that they are "entangled" in our economies ("Politics" 22-23).

Understanding these entangled conditions requires risks to be connected with the "accident." In *The Original Accident* (2005), Paul Virilio argues that any technological invention is also the invention of its eventual failure, malfunction or disaster. The invention of the airplane, for instance, inversely carries with it the phenomenon of the plane crash. The *Titanic* summoned icebergs as villainous points of collision. The nuclear power plant already contains the seeds for a meltdown. The accident (*accidens*) provides insight into "what is beneath" (*substare*) any of these tools: their inevitable failure (10). In the twentieth century, the amount of accidents began to pile up at an alarming rate. Political ecology, as Virilio calls it, must now transform politics to draw attention to these accidents.

On this score, *political ecology* cannot long go on sweeping under the carpet the *eschatological* dimension of the calamities caused by the positivist ideology of Progress. (11)

Virilio's accidents are another way of considering the kinds of manufactured risks inherent in human-designed technology. These broken projects, so often swept under the carpet (of the pastoral), are the scraps of both broken and working equipment that constitute the machinery of the petroleum industry. Political ecology, for Virilio, must take into account the impact of this invisibility, a task aided by Rivas's literary project of *hartismo*.

This sinister aspect of the *Prestige* appears in the section entitled "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday," from the environmental section "La revolución del mar." In the fragment "La boca del *Prestige*" Rivas reflects on Xurxo Lobato's famous picture of the sinking ship, attributing "a dramatic expression" to its final grimace (257). The *Prestige*, he claims, speaks in this photograph. It "vomits" or spews the anthropomorphic gesture of desperation. It is also as if the ship were looking at us, making visible what is invisible: its embodiment of a manufactured risk of global economic movement. What do these human-like qualities do to the image of the boat? I submit that our detection of anthropomorphism is a sign that something sinister and "alive" is at work in the *Prestige* itself. In contrast to an anthropocentric perspective, we are forced to reconcile that a nonliving, nonhuman object is *speaking* to us, that it is speaking to us about its silent yet volatile capacity. Rivas writes:

[La foto] [1]lama a la humanidad, como si el mar, con el entendimiento de ese arquero zen que es el fotógrafo, lo mantuviese a flote el tiempo necesario para que

el nervio óptico transmita un dardo estremecedor a la glándula de la vergüenza de los dioses impacientes, los de la Era del Petróleo. (257-58)

*La boca del Prestige* marks the vessel as an actant because it *speaks* to us in an uncanny human language. The reader will recall Coixet's introductory interview and the interruptive cut to the *Prestige* sinking in silence. This commentary enriches Coixet's use of the meanwhile because it activates the *Prestige* as a character speaking directly to us.<sup>138</sup> The *Prestige*, as an instantiation of our maritime technology, speaks to the underside of its invention: the accident.

The sea is another powerful actant in Rivas's text. As mentioned above, Rivas poetically observes that the sea began the *Nunca Más* movement. In the second fragment of "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday," the event is born out of silence: "Primero fue el silencio" (254). But this is not an example of mute silence but rather of a fecund sort:

Ese silencio inquietante que precede a las tormentas y a los seísmos. Luego, el estupor. El choque, el impacto, el dolor. Otra clase de silencio: trágico, hamletiano, de inseguridad, miedo y duda. (Ibid)

This is an uncanny silence that paradoxically works as a medium for the speech of the sea: "El hecho de que el mar hable: ¡Yo acuso! ¡Yo denuncio!" (255).<sup>139</sup> The human silence gives way to the oxymoronic deafening (and damning) silence of the sea. We should read the sea's silence as a kind of uncanny speech that marks the beginning of a dynamic protest movement.

How does the sea become a catalyzing actant in this democratic movement? Precisely because it is so intertwined with Galician identity. Rivas presses us on this point, arguing that life on the Galician coast attunes one to the rhythms and tones of the

sea. Just as a farmer is said to be in tune with the cultivated soil, so too is the seafarer to the sea. Indeed, he jokes that sailors have physically mutated because of their intimacy with the sea. They have “the largest ears of all” (Ibid). This joke also points to the intimate connection between the seascape and the cultural identity in Galicia. Rivas begins to sketch a vernacular landscape counterpoised to the official silence of the Fraga government. The language of the vernacular landscape begins with the shockingly voiced silence of the sea itself. Speaking out is a form of channelling the language of Galicia’s vernacular landscape and, furthermore, transforming how it appears in political discourse.

The sea is not the only local idiosyncrasy of Galician identity to show up in the movement’s images. Rivas considers the recycling of iconic Galician symbols to be instances of avant-garde protest art. Due to Galicia’s famously rainy weather, protesters showed up in massive numbers with umbrellas in tow, objects that Rivas describes as other appendages for Galicians (261). Rivas also references the off-kilter Galician joke that normally is meant to indicate the “servitude” of Galicians: “mean por nosotros y decimos que llueve” (Ibid). For Rivas, the mobilization of umbrellas as protest objects marks an ironic (*hartista*) transformation of the umbrella into an instrument of liberation: “Soltaron la pesadumbre de la espalda y la abrieron en forma de alas” (Ibid). Another important example is *La Marcha de las Maletas*, in which more than a hundred thousand showed up in A Coruña on February 3rd, 2003 with suitcases in hand. The suitcase as a protest-object also counteracts the old adage that Galicians do not protest; they emigrate (262). In opposition to this stereotype, the *maleta* was meant to cast off and say goodbye to the destructive “fatalism” of the *Prestige* crisis. Similar instances occurred with bagpipes (*la “marea gaiteira”*), conch shells (*los gramófonos del mar*), musical concerts

and soccer matches. This ironic play unbinds these icons from their essentializing connotations about Galicia. That is to say, these objects of Galician identity become *hartista* protest pieces that fundamentally altered the public discourse of the *Prestige*.

Moreover, these protests were not simply local to Galicia. There were protests and shows of solidarity in Switzerland, Madrid and Brussels, to name a few. Such acts not only re-affirm local identity but also translate it into a different register, one sensitively grafted onto global concerns of ecological fragility. In *Españoles todos* (2004), a series of essays dedicated to Spanish social and political issues, Galician author Suso de Toro argues that *Nunca Más* is a model for a democracy to come insofar as the platform re-composed traditional icons into symbols of environmental protest and constructed important alliances around important environmentalist issues. Whereas older forms of identity tended to insulate a world and gaze inward, *Nunca Más* became what Toro describes as transnational and open through the common cause of environmental concern. As a platform for political action, *Nunca Más* became inclusive, uniting old school nationalists with the left against ineptitude and silence.

Nunca Más es un movimiento trasnacional, horizontal, abierto, adherible, de regeneración democrática, de exigencia de decencia a una administración inepta, mentirosa y culpable. (124-25)

Looking into human responses through the posture of *el hartismo*, Virilio's political ecology needs a literary exploration of silence and speech. *(H)artismo* helps us re-formulate what silence and speech mean because it is not simply about being "fed up" but rather offers different ways of paying attention (to an ecological crisis) and to what we mean by "the facts."

Regional identity read through an environmental disaster becomes an example of an open and porous set of alliances between animals, rocks, humans, umbrellas, suitcases, land and water, all woven together in a heterogeneous cultural object. This would allow for culture that at once moves away from clichés and creates awareness about Galicia as a cultural center in Spain. This transformation, then, embodies what Rábade Villar described above as a “speakable” home. The *oikos* of Galicia, often remaining invisible and “unspeakable,” entered the forefront of political discourse as a fragile composite of humans and nonhumans. This sense of interconnection creates a new politics because we begin to realize that we are terrifyingly dependent on fragile equilibriums on global and local levels.

#### 5d. Re-existencia: the Reappearance of Iberia as an Ecological Collective

Reflecting on *Nunca Más*, Txetxu Aguado has argued that its values should be new models for thinking about national identity in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the movement was not only about environmental disaster but also about political disgust with the regional and national governments’ continual unwillingness to act with transparency on behalf of its citizens. More broadly, the movement rejects Galician identity as stereotypical backward and instead becomes culturally transformative. Such a moment requires a certain amount of reflection that I will use to conclude this chapter. Aguado observes that, “El primer gesto consistirá en el básico de volver a mirarnos y decidir qué se ha sido y qué se quiere ser” (“Susos de Toro”). As I have argued here, what is unique about this paradigm of self-reflexivity is that it is not *merely* inwardly drawn towards an internal recognition of a single group, but rather as a community in relation to its surroundings ecosystems. Ecological fragility, then, comes to involve a pluralism of



cultural identities and habitats, sharing in collective strengths and vulnerabilities. It is this idea that is, in my view, so significant for re-thinking Iberian cultural identity. While *Nunca Más* certainly expresses particularities unique to Galicia, its appearance contains the seeds of how Iberian identity might be re-formulated in a time of increasing ecological awareness and globalized risks. Aguado meditates on this kind of pluralism in two questions:

¿Es posible desde mi identidad llegar a conocer las otras locales? E incluso añadiría, ¿puede la propuesta local relacionarse con lo universal? En la primera pregunta, mi identidad local quiere ser consciente de lo que ocurre a su alrededor. No renuncia a participar en ese acervo común que compartimos como seres humanos. (Ibid)

This *acervo común* points to a common environment that, when threatened and destroyed, as we saw in Coixet's necro-pastoral and Rivas's petro-melancholia, propelled a democratic resurgence in response. The *Prestige* crisis functions as a catalyst to experience our connection to these ecosystems. Moreover, the above analysis has indicated that culture itself is not simply related to its surrounding ecosystems but dramatically dependent on their wellbeing.

Galicia was not the only region affected by the spill; other contaminated coasts include those of Portugal, the Basque Country and France. Furthermore, as we saw in *Marea blanca*, the spill altered environmental consciousness throughout the Peninsula and Europe. One must ask: even if other parts of Spain were not as affected by this spill, what is the transformative power here for Iberian identity as a whole? It is useful to put this re-appearance in theoretical terms. In *Communication Power* (2009), Catalan

sociologist Manuel Castells lays out a theory of power based on his notion of the network society, a concept similar to Latour's actor-network theory.<sup>140</sup> For Castells, networks are interconnected by a series of nodes, what we typically consider to be centers of concentrated power. In Spain's context, the obvious example is Madrid's centralized political importance. Significantly, central nodes only possess power in relationship to the entire network. Indeed, one should consider the Fraga government to be a secondary, contiguous node in Madrid's network. As units, "networks process flows" of information, of, for instance, political ideologies and cultural policies (20). If a program, which disseminates this information, such as the 2002 Spanish government's political machine, is faced with a drastically different situation, it may be unable to adequately respond to it. "To alter the outcomes of the network, a new program (a set of goals-oriented, compatible codes) needs to be installed in the network—from outside the network" (Ibid).

Faced with the government's inadequate response, *Nunca Más* had no choice but to create a new system of information about the oil spill, altering the awareness of the *Prestige* case. This newly established network, however, did not materialize out of thin air, but rather, as demonstrated above, re-articulates cultural identity in order to democratically promote new causes, such as establishing a new network of Iberia in which cultural power does not flow from one center, or node, but rather through a plurality of different points, in which cultures of peripheral nationalities are considered of equal importance to Spain's cultural patrimony. In the case of *Nunca Más*, this new network was born of ecological concern for Galicia's coastline. This new program

requires further consideration, indeed much more than I can give it here, in order to understand how relations between different nodes communicate.

Riva's recent *A desaparición da neve* (2009) is a poetry collection that contemplates such a transformation in the context of Spain's pluralist culture. To my knowledge, this text is a unique undertaking for a Galician poet or, for that matter, any poet in Iberia because these forty poems are offered in four different languages: the Galician "originals," Rivas's own translation into Castilian, Jon Kortazar's translation into Basque and Biel Mesquida's Catalan translation. Upon publication, the collection's catchphrase on the volume's back cover indicates that it is a composition of "a biodiversity of languages," suggesting that Iberian linguistic confluence is as diverse and interrelated as an ecosystem. This inclusionary approach to four of Iberia's languages is coupled with the themes of body and nature through an "enigmatic organization," conjuring up what Rivas often describes in his writings as "la boca de la literatura: las palabras en vilo," pointing to the unstable, suspended nature of constructing literature. Poetry, due to peculiar innerworkings between multiple languages, is entangled in a constant trafficking of translations, mutations and variations. In this text, the articulation of cultural pluralism becomes productively visible as an unstable "biodiversity" of languages, ideas and bodies. In another essay, Rivas refers to the "mouth of literature" as a convergence of different voices, what we might consider to be the innerworkings of Iberia's multiple linguistic communities("A boca").<sup>141</sup> This "mouth" does not "speak" in a single language, but rather operates as a generative font of linguistic variation. Translation, rather than mere articulation, is its *modus operandi*.

Writing on *A desaparición da neve*, Kirsty Hooper notes that this text has a particular way of disorienting the reader (Lakhdari 123). Where am I to begin? With the original Galician? Or is it just as well to begin with the Castilian that the same author wrote? And what of the Basque and Catalan translation? Are they different works? Less original? The textual organization also emphasizes this bewilderment, beginning with the Galician, following with the Castilian translation, then the Catalan and Basque. This bewilderment asks us to consider: why do the translations begin in this order? What are the relationships between each of the sections? Moreover, the poems themselves do not yield facile connections to any politics that would look like “a biodiversity of languages.” Instead, the poems operate on an experimental level, commenting on art, capitalism, silence, sound and nature. What seems to unify these poems is the constant mediation on how to write poetry after the disaster, or, to put in Castells’s terms, after the failure of one network and the beginning of another. On this structural level, the volume explores the processes of exchange and translation in a multi-lingual space.

What kind of network does Rivas propose? While the text does not spell out a specific network failure, the title makes an ominous reference to global warming. Connecting the book’s catch phrase “biodiversity of languages” suggests that linguistic diversity is as endangered as the biodiversity of species. Rivas’s text, however, does not announce the death of minor languages in Spain, but rather seeks to “upgrade” our understanding of how this network operates. Afterall, the resonance of *Nunca Más* is very much due to its re-invigoration of culture. One poem entitled “Historia del arte” describes an artist saving his artwork from the rising waters of a river flooding his studio.<sup>142</sup> Another, with the familiar title “Mayday,” narrates the diverse effects of a

ship's distress call on land and at sea.<sup>143</sup> A third introspectively examines the poet's relationship to money and the larger themes of economic woes in Europe while another looks at the 11-M terrorist attacks.<sup>144</sup> The poem I will conclude with, "La enigmática organización," displays a prescience of how risks (and, therefore, potential disasters) affect the ecological and cultural diversity of Iberia. As we have seen throughout this chapter, these poems address such concerns through a vacillation between speech and silence, between what is visible and invisible.

"La enigmática organización" is the first poem in the volume and reflexively comments on the enigmatic reasoning behind the collection. Let us consider the first half of the poem:

Vienen las palabras a reclamar lo suyo,  
Lo substraído.  
Fuera de los campos de trabajo,  
Se mueven cuidadosas como porcelana  
O el primer día de abril.  
¿No percibes el aroma hidrófilo  
de sus hojas de mazorca,  
el sudor argonauta de su grano?  
Existen.  
Existe el aviador que lee braille en la noche.  
Existe la bizca que lleva voces bajas  
en su paje de erizos.  
Existe la boca de la literatura,  
la loca que habla sola,  
como una medusa.  
Existe la boca del pozo que enjambra  
pulposa, mal hablada. (79)

Language, metonymically arriving as *palabras* (words), is heralded into the beginning of the poem. Its operations are almost invisible; it is as if language here behaves as if it were some small animal scurrying away from a passerby. As readers, we are able to detect smells and traces of these linguistic movements that appear completely alien. Yet the text

wants to draw our attention to this ontological activity of language, to the unstable composition of “la boca de la literatura.” This mouth of literature becomes instantiated as “la loca que habla sola / como medusa.” And this “boca” exists, but its lines and articulations come out twisted and unintelligible. As readers, we struggle to “translate” the verse. Language does not simply flow but swarms through texts just as bees move around a hive. These images are suggestive of what Rábade Villar described above as a project of identity based on the cracks and fissures inherent in a diverse cultural space. Translation, in Rivas’s text, moves chaotically through an *oikos* of different species, speech acts, and threatening industrial objects. This linguistic ecology is no longer simply the national identity project of Galicia, but rather a glimpse into the messiness inherent in a pluralistic democracy. Indeed, as readers, the volume pushes our linguistic abilities into a space of multiple nodes of what may well be “unspeakable” or “unreadable.” Indeed, if there is a shared disaster in *A desaparición da neve*, it is the threat of this network of languages and bodies disappearing completely. This “enigmatic organization” urges us to reflect on who and what surrounds, influences and contributes to local identity.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, various manufactured risks of a globalized economy expose the interconnectedness of local cultures via the fragility of ecosystems. Instead of denying these factors, local cultural identity becomes a way to speak with or for the *oikos*: to render the unspeakable speakable. In Coixet’s film, the invisible wounds from the *Prestige* disaster come to light through a process of juxtaposition and extraction inherent in the necro-pastoral. While the “Save the Beach” campaign is commendable for its attempts to raise awareness about maintaining clean

beaches, the film falters in addressing the political and economic concerns that created the disaster in the first place.

By introducing Manuel Rivas's discussion of *hartismo*, we observed a strategy of *des-lectura*, of slowing down and challenging many of the fictions that are often rendered truths in the hyperconsciousness of today's world. I pointed out that such reading is key to understand the impact of ecological violence often unfolding in the periphery or background of our world. This strategy urges us to pay closer attention to the behavior and "speech" of objects and environments, insofar as they will be the first to indicate a moment of crisis. By slowing down our reading of environments, petro-melancholia becomes a mode of disaffection during an ecological crisis, which is not merely the mourning of a lost nature but also the lamentation that modernity has failed us, insofar as its mechanisms and behavior are slowly decimating the biosphere and human communities. Finally, following Toro and Aguado, I have argued that *Nunca Más* is indicative of new kind of democratic politics, predicated on a plurality of network nodes. *A desaparición da neve* offers ways to contemplate Iberian identity through the inherent messiness of translation. In turn, the production and study of Galician culture gains visibility and complexity through an invigorated ecological consciousness, creating a nexus of human and nonhuman voices to combat the threat of disappearance.

## **Conclusions: The Future of Ecological Cultural Production in the Iberian Peninsula**

To conclude, I will offer a brief consideration of the word contact. In the introduction, I explained that one useful way to approach and potentially critique environmental discourse is through the dichotomy of the local and the global. The local, encapsulated in the introduction through the niche of bioregionalism, is about protecting regionally “unique” culture, flora and fauna. Reading texts from this scale allows for a lens to understand how unique eco-cultural systems appear refracted in texts.

Bioregionalism wants to *protect* a specific niche even at the expense of other areas. On the other hand, the act of reading supposedly local texts inevitably leads to the appearance nonlocal influences and presences. In my view, this is the inevitable presence of the global in contemporary cultural production. Culture, and specifically ecologically oriented culture, consistently precludes the possibility of shuttering a particular niche from the rest of the system it belongs to. That is to say, culture can lead us to imagining networks beyond the niche.

In “Extension,” Riechmann’s poetry suggests such a perspective in at least three ways. First, after witnessing the ecological inviability of the philosophical term extension, poetry arrived to rescue the term from its antiquated meaning as “brute matter.” Riechmann can be read to extend the rights of the polis to nature, what used to be considered as the realm of brute matter. Secondly, what I described as the poetics of the meanwhile also became a way of understanding the experience of the global in the local experience of reading about global warming in a newspaper. This experience was about the affective contact after discovering that the Northwest Passage is now navigable for the first time in human history. The poem, then, becomes a conduit to imagine the



phenomenon of global warming, what Riechmann describes as a consequence of “ecocidio,” on a local level. Finally, as a means to move beyond the pure negativity of this last notion, *la ciudad-bosque* proposes greater inclusion of nonhuman beings within human communities. Unlike the already existent notion of green spaces, *la ciudad-bosque* advocates for greater equity and presence of nonhumans throughout the city, effectively moving beyond the nature-culture divide through notions such as limiting the (human-driven) growth of cities, using renewable energies towards the end of self-sufficiency and developing “collective” transportation. I also note that several of Riechmann’s proposals are already in play in Spain because many of its youth have become disenfranchised and disillusioned with traditional city life and have in fact left the city to reinvigorate rural life through what has been described as *eco-aldeas*.

“Experiment” translates this poetics into the visual esthetics of landscape painting. Beginning with a discussion of the *Observatori del paisatge*, I lay out the existing European Convention on Landscape, which protects the cultural and ecological heritage represented in landscapes. However there are several assumptions within these proposals that have become antiquated due to the forces of globalization. Through Joan Nogué’s discussion, we saw that the triad of nature-culture-region, representing a protective localism quite similar to bioregionalism, is unable to describe the shape, contour and changes occurring throughout Spanish landscapes. The notion of the sprawlscape, a consequence of globalization, defies traditional experiences of localism. As a means to move beyond nature-culture-region, I look to the experimental landscapes of Lluís Sabadell Artiga and Perejaume, who both practice esthetics that work to create closer contact between nonhumans, artists and viewers. In “Manifest contra El Paistage,”

Sabadell deconstructs the visual reification of nature inherent in the word paisatge through what he describes as visualism. His work, then, sacrifices the hegemony of vision in favor of other modes of contact between the artist, the viewer and nonhumans. Finally, Perejaume's *Tres dibujos de Madrid* is an example of what Perejaume himself describes as *la acción*: a meeting point between heterogeneous elements, in this case, between three artworks, a group of professors, artists, engineers, a security guard and the city of Madrid. In the action, Perejaume sought to again give the eighteenth-century paintings contact with the city they once knew. In so doing, he also attempts to connect the cultural center of Madrid with its outskirts by leaving the city on foot—a nearly impossible task! While Sabadell and Perejaume do not specifically address the question of globalization, their esthetics should be read as a response to the crisis of landscape in an era of globalization. They both work to bridge human expression to develop new visual language about our surroundings.

“Depth” enters into the weird rural imaginary of Basque landscape painter Vicente Ameztoy, whose frames and peculiar style of experimentation are reminiscent of Magritte insofar as they both make strange composition of the objects they contemplate. In my view, Ameztoy challenges ethnocentric Basque nationalism by denaturalizing the *Umwelt*, or the niche, previously utilized to uphold Sabino Arana's conservative vision of the Basque Country. In its place, Ameztoy intertwines humans with flora, what most often remains at the backdrop of landscape painting. Through this entanglement, I argue that Ameztoy presents an alternative ecological history of the Basque Country that often displays the elements unwanted by Arana's rural vision. These elements include such phenomena as deforestation and industrialization. Another consequence of this

entanglement with nonhumans is the implicit agency endowed upon plants as actants in the landscape painting. In this way, Ameztoy's esthetics shows another way that we might consider the political importance of plant life in relationship to Basque identity.

Francesc Serés, the focal point of "Disappearance," began a literary project in order to meditate on a single question: how is possible to write from a disappeared place that has no literature? To gauge his response, I introduced the notion of the rural Atlantis, a demolished site to which we cannot return. There are, however, remnants of what was once exhibited through objects that have since lost their use value for humans. In *Els ventres de la terra*, I offer a reading of the protagonist's attempts to return to the site of a town he abandoned as a child. He discovers that the house, fields and town resist his attempts to recollect and collate a unified narrative of his life. In the wake of this journey, Serés's prose becomes a series of photographic essays into a longer untold narrative about rural life, migration to the city and the subsequent reflection about this transformative move. In Serés's narrative, objects serve as pivots for these reflections but only reveal partial truths about past rural life. The novel is also interested in the shared phenomenon of disappearance beyond the life of a particular town. In my chapter, I connected the protagonist's own flight from his town to the larger issue of Franco's development of hydroelectric dams throughout the Franja region. The protagonist, ironically working at one of these dams as an engineer, also makes this connection and examines the strange life of objects in another town that had been flooded because of a dam project. Serés, then, is an author interested in exploring the forgotten ecological history of La Franja while also gesturing at ways to understand the rural's disappearance as a common experience throughout Spain.

In my final chapter, “Re-appearance,” I examine the *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Galicia and the subsequent democratic protest, known as *Nunca Más*, in the absence of an adequate response by the government. As a means to survey the effect of this movement, I examine Isabel Coixet’s *Marea negra*, a homage to the international volunteer cleanup crews after the spill. In my view, Coixet’s documentary operates as a necro-pastoral because it consistently jumps between pristine shots of the Galician coastline eight years after the spill and footage of the ongoing crisis. While I recognize the importance of giving voice to the volunteers, I argued that Coixet’s *Marea negra* does not approach the political side of the crisis. In order to engage with this question, I turned to the work of Manuel Rivas, who actively participated in the *Nunca Más* protests. For Rivas, the government’s inept silence and inaction gave a needed platform to the democratically disillusioned Galician populace. Moreover, I view the crisis as a catalyst not only for greater ecologically awareness in Iberia but also as a new way of approaching the peninsula as an eco-cultural network.

Though the examples from Madrid, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia offer compelling illustrations of how contemporary cultural production displays various forms of ecological awareness, there is still more work to be done. Even if many of the artists and authors I discuss here are obscure, these regions are already the most visible minority cultures in Spain. In this sense, future eco-critical work on Spain should focus on other regions not taken up in this study such as Andalusia, Valencia, Extremadura among others. The proliferation of these added voices would only signal further the cultural and ecological diversity of the peninsula as well as the identification of shared environmental issues. Secondly, there is the question of Portugal, which becomes

imperative if one is indeed committed to thinking about Iberia beyond the limitations of strictly national borders. Finally, the majority of the texts represented in this project deal solely with contemporary issues of globalization and global warming. It is, however, important to also give historical depth to the image of landscape in the Iberian Peninsula because many of these cultural, political and proto-environmental discourses have been carved into the contours of the land itself. In a future project that expands on the concept of the rural Atlantis, I am interested in such historicity as a means of tracing the forgotten ecological histories of the rural in novels about multiple parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Such comparative work will help render visible the often forgotten imprints of modernity on the hinterland.

Finally, though it seems that environmentalism is always a project born after a crisis, I would like to conclude on a note of hope. This project has explored what I see as a unique and heterogeneous collection of texts, artworks and personalities. Despite this uniqueness, all of the figures discussed in this work share the affinity of working through a critical moment in their milieu, ecocide, sprawls, ethnocentrism, disappeared villages or oil spills, in order to imagine new solutions to these crises. Experimental landscapes operate as visual, textual or moving image manifestos that seek to negate stagnant ideas and reinvigorate their respective artistic mediums. These negations, however, are not erasures, but a means of representing unseen and unconsidered connections between human and nonhuman beings. Such art asks its viewers and readers to think beyond what they consider to be culture's niche.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Today there are 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities.

<sup>2</sup> “Humanist phenomenology,” taken here, argues that it is necessary to take up a wide variety of *viewpoints* in order to understand the totality of what a given landscape means. Its point of departure is, therefore, based on the human experience of landscape.

<sup>3</sup> One might consider, for instance, a topic-based approach, looking at particular political issues such as biodiversity or sustenance farming as it is at work in particular texts. On the other hand, much productive work is also done in animal studies, which looks at the power of nonhumans at work in our own cultures and texts.

<sup>4</sup> Once “natural” borderlines are used as a new kind of political and economic divisions, communities quickly begin to look very much like xenophobic and conservative ideologies because they tend to privilege one social, ethnic or racial group over another.

<sup>5</sup> Américo Castro has, of course, used the term *convivencia* to argue that many “Christian” texts and cultural icons are in fact of Jewish or Moorish origin (*España en su historia*). Though I am aware of this connotation, the term has use here as an appropriate translation of the term coexistence, by which I mean cultural and ecological coexistence.

<sup>6</sup> In particular, I am thinking of the developments in phenomenology from the likes of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Immanuel Levinas as well as their poststructuralist ascendants such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

<sup>7</sup> Considering the massive amount of novels that deal with “disappeared” towns, I see this topic as an actual genre of literature. In addition to Serés, a few prominent examples of these novels include: Jesús López Pacheco’s *Central eléctrica* (1958), Jesús Moncada’s *El camión de sirga* (1989), Julio Llamazares’s *La lluvia amarilla* (1988), and Juan Goytisolo’s *La changa* (1985).

<sup>8</sup> I use the Latin term *natura*, as opposed to *naturata*, because the former denotes the generative power of nature while the later simply individual iterations of nature (e.g. pine trees, polar bears or a wild boar).

<sup>9</sup> Within the scene of contemporary philosophy, I am thinking of philosophy of mind that Lingis critiques in *The Imperative* because it still tends to bracket the world in a reductionist fashion

<sup>10</sup> Paul Crutzen coined the term Anthropocene in 2002 in order to explicate the extent of human impact on various ecosystems: the creation of a new geological epoch.

<sup>11</sup> This claim in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is indicative of the symptom of *res-extendens-cogitans*: “Thus the conception of *body* indicates something—for example, metal—which can be cognized by means of that conception” (55). On this view, matter’s sole function is to fill in a concept.

<sup>12</sup> I use one half of Heidegger’s famous tool analysis intentionally to further call attention to the stale brutality of considering the multiplicity of objects as matter, stagnate billiard balls predictably colliding in a material causation. In my view, it is more productive to amplify the other half of the analysis: present-at-hand towards every individual object. For more on this viewpoint, see Harman, *The Quadruple Object*.

<sup>13</sup> On this subject Riechmann himself states: “Parafraseando a Godard: no se trata de escribir poesía política, sino de escribir políticamente poesía” (*Poesía practicable* 26).

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<sup>14</sup> I follow Cuban poet José Lezama Lima in my definition of resistance. For Lezama, resistance is a literary-historical combination of different images. *Resistencia* is an active series of movements and operations that creates la imago, “*la imagen participando en la historia*,” which is precisely not a fixed concept or real entity. Resistance is the exchange between images and the reader, an idea close to Riechmann’s dialogue between world and text.

<sup>15</sup> These diverse citations are exemplary of Riechmann’s epigraphs: two Greek poets, one North American Beat author and one English admirer of Japanese culture.

<sup>16</sup> The term is a reference to Levi Bryant’s recent book *The Democracy of Objects* (2011). His work is a contribution to a new development in continental philosophy known as object-oriented philosophy. Bryant develops what he calls a “flat ontology,” in which human interactions are simply one part of larger “autopoietic-systems” (Sacilotto 427). His position is theoretically close to the poetic effects of experimental landscapes.

<sup>17</sup> Spanish poet Ángel González’s poetry places emphasis on lived experience and colloquial language over esthetic abstraction (Mayhew, *The Poetics* 132). Yet his work also approached the subject with ironic tones constantly questioning the status of language, similar to what Riechmann proposes here about the double bind between world and language.

<sup>18</sup> So-called social poetry from 1950s Spain is known for its renovation away from pure esthetics, according to José Hierro, and working like poets “[que] son meros transmisores, traductores al lenguaje humano” (Blanco Aguinaga 192).

<sup>19</sup> Historically, *poesía pura* refers to the so-called Generation of 1927, who developed a Spanish version of avant-garde poetry. Ortega y Gasset has famously considered this experimentation to be a move away from humanized and natural poetic language and themes, favoring instead “dehumanized” poetry.

<sup>20</sup> Riechmann speaks of fiestas and (more generally) social interactions as possible moments of encounter or transformation because these are “tiempo[s] para que sean posibles las sorpresas, las epifanías, las apariciones” (*Gente* 223-24). These moments, often chalked up to “leisure time” are in fact ripe as pockets of resistance.

<sup>21</sup> *Poniente almariense* refers to Campo de Dalías in Almería, which is dominated by greenhouse agriculture, covering an area of 37,000 acres in the mid-1990s. Calvin Wilvert describes their structure: “Coastal lowland Almeria is unique not only in the extent of greenhouses but also in the type. Unlike the rigid, rounded, metal-framed, glass structures long typical of most other places, these are almost flat-roofed enclosures with plastic sheeting covering a skeleton of wooden posts and wires. Remarkably, this immense agglomeration of distinctive greenhouses--known as the parral type--has become a major presence only since the mid-1970s” (32). Riechmann references this farming situation because of the ecological scarcity of the region. Environmentalists have called attention to lack of water and soil available for such intense farming practices.

<sup>22</sup> The Wilkins Ice Shelf is located in the southwestern part of the Arctic peninsula. Named after Sir Hubert Wilkins, who aerially surveyed the area. In the 2000s, scientists have observed that the shelf has in fact shattered into arrays of icebergs because of the region’s warming temperatures.

<sup>23</sup> A few of Bogost’s examples are: “Smoke vacuums through the valve, grommet, and hose of a hookah and enters a pursed mouth. The dog teeth of a collar engage a gear

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against a the layshaft coupling of a transmission assembly. The soluble cartilage of a chicken neck decocts from the bone into the stock of consommé” (61).

<sup>24</sup> Slavoj Žižek discusses this denial of climate change in *In Defense of Lost Causes*. “‘I choose to ignore it and act as if I don’t know it.’ This prevents us from confronting the true question: *how do these new conditions compel us to transform and reinvent the very notions of freedom, autonomy and ethical responsibility*” (436).

<sup>25</sup> The poem “La condición humana” defines “un ente” as an “entre”: “el entredos / el entretrés el entremuchos” (*El común* 227).

<sup>26</sup> The late nineteenth-century author William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) is often cited as a founding text in ecosocialism. The term gained currency in the 1970s with the work of biologist Barry Commoner and activist Rudolph Bahro (Esbjörn-Hargens 525-26). In Spain, philosopher and Francoist turned Marxist Manuel Sacristán is seen as a pivotal thinker, especially in relationship to the founding of the journal *Mientras tanto* in 1979, which is dedicated to the subject of ecosocialism (López Arnal 1-6). In the first issue of *Mientras tanto* Sacristán states “para que tras esta noche oscura de la crisis de una civilización despuntara una humanidad más justa en una Tierra habitable, en vez de un inmenso rebaño de atontados ruidosos en un estercolero químico, farmacéutico y radiactivo” (*Ibid* 6).

<sup>27</sup> Riechmann cites the Spanish socialist Fernando de los Ríos in this economic discussion: “si queremos hacer al hombre libre tenemos que hacer a la economía esclava” (*El socialismo* 142).

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, following Resina and Viestenz, I argue that “a new ruralism” is a concept desperately needed in any kind of “combate cultural.”

<sup>29</sup> One should not think that Riechmann is not advocating for a return to nineteenth-century practices or theories, but rather for a return to the kind of utopianism left behind in our era of consumer-oriented capitalism.

<sup>30</sup> “Así pues, se mire por donde se mire, en la propia esencia del concepto de paisaje existe una dimensión comunicativa, puesto que éste no se concibe sin un observador, ya sea individual o colectivo, que, con su mirada, dota de identidad a un territorio determinando. La geografía humana y cultural contemporánea entiende en buena medida el paisaje de la forma que acabamos de describir” (*Teoría y paisaje* 30).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Page 30.

<sup>32</sup> As of summer 2012, the *Observatori* also possesses a respectably sized, multilingual library, devoted to the analysis of landscape.

<sup>33</sup> While there are not counterparts to the *Oberservatori* in other parts of Spain, the *Observatorio de Sustentabilidad* also began in accordance with the European Convention on Landscape.

<sup>34</sup> Lezama Lima aptly captures this point: “Lo único que crea cultura es el paisaje y eso lo tenemos de maestra monstruosidad” (Lezama 72).

<sup>35</sup> In the introduction, I followed Nogué’s argument that landscapes are simultaneously *lo significado*, the terrain itself, as well as the signifiers of the social narratives constructed around that terrain (cf. 11-12).

<sup>36</sup> Sabadell, for instance, led a seminar entitled *Pirineus: art i ecologia al s. XXI* and a second group exploring the prospects of post-oil cities. He also is on the advisory board of *La Joya de arte y ecología*, an art collective in southern Andalusia.



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<sup>37</sup> Architectural theory has also shifted in strategies with respect to the architect, whose role as visionary has mutated to the role of designer. Alejandro Zaera Polo's recent politization of the architectural envelope approaches the loss of place I am thinking about here. The envelope, one of the oldest terms in the architectural lexicon, separates the inside from the outside in order to create an isolated, controlled environment.

<sup>38</sup> This language is reminiscent of Max Nordau's famous *Degeneration* (1892), which pronounces cultural and artistic production in Europe as decadent and decaying.

<sup>39</sup> Perejaume, whose art is the subject of part three of this chapter, is one exception to this rule. Some of his actions have literally placed a landscape painting in the scene they are supposed to represent.

<sup>40</sup> Adorno sums up this argument in these two sentences, which serve as Bürger's epigraph: "Its autonomy (that of art) sure remains irrevocable. It is impossible to conceive of the autonomy of art without covering up work" (35).

<sup>41</sup> Jay also notes that most readers point to the personal experience of his father's blindness as an influence on Bataille's fascination with denigrated vision ("Disenchantment" 16-17).

<sup>42</sup> This also brings to mind Adorno's often-cited contention that was no longer possible to write poetry after the holocaust. "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (*Prisms* 34).

<sup>43</sup> In his lifetime, Bataille's work was largely ignored by many of his contemporaries because of his interests in mysticism and human sacrifice, among other themes. However, his thought engaged with André Breton's surrealism, to the point of the two having several infamous fights. He additionally wrote on Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* and Kojève's Hegelianism (*Selected Writings*).

<sup>44</sup> Bataille's most infamous use of the eye is in the *Story of the Eye*, which captures the enucleation of a bullfighter's eye by a bullhorn (an event Bataille actually witnessed). But more importantly it serves his reversal of Freud's use of the visual in *Civilization and its Discontents*, which associates the visual with elevation and civilization. Bataille sought instead to denigrate the eye to the level of animalic immanence (Jay, "Disenchantment" 18).

<sup>45</sup> Allan Stoekl has recently suggested in his book dedicated to discerning Bataille's contribution (and critique) of sustainability, Bataille seems to be an odd candidate for an ecologically aware thinker. Indeed, his thought privileges expenditure of energy over its conservation. Such a position has led to numerous "co-optations" of Bataille's thought as emblematic of postmodern consumerist culture.

<sup>46</sup> Bataille was fascinated with Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1923), an ethnographic treatise studying gift-giving economies throughout indigenous communities. Gifts, Mauss argues, are never free but always obligate some kind of return. He writes: "What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?" (4).

<sup>47</sup> I allude here to Bataille's discussion of animals in *Theory of Religion*. Being animal, for Bataille, has its origins in "the state in which one animal eats another" (17). At the moment of consumption, the animal is unable to differentiate the other from itself or the environment, leaving it in a state of pure immanence (18). Bataille returns to this notion

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in the third chapter of *Theory of Religion* and compares the animalic state to the moment of sacrifice.

<sup>48</sup> The reference is to *Inner Experience*, largely compiled of notes, but offers analysis on the relationship of the inner-self to the outer environment.

<sup>49</sup> As discussed in my introduction, Perejaume argues elsewhere that it is better to refer to landscapes like Miró referred to objects in his studio: “this one,” “that one,” “that over yonder.” (Resina, *New Ruralism*)

<sup>50</sup> In an interview with the author, Perejaume stated that he has rarely had an interest in documenting his actions as they occur; he suggested that such an approach would distract attention from the other elements at work.

<sup>51</sup> This approach to *Tres dibujos* is tied to Resina’s idea of the after-image, which undercuts the “serial or static way” images are typically analyzed (Resina, *The New Rural* 114).

<sup>52</sup> Due to the accumulation of dead plant matter, eutrophication, in this case, staves off light and consequently lowers oxygen levels in the water for other flora and fauna.

<sup>53</sup> These image-essays are similar to Sabadell’s text-images, in so far as both operate as kinds of ekphrasis, blurring the lines between the textual and the visual.

<sup>54</sup> The language is reminiscent of Zaera Polo’s architectural envelope (cf. note 37).

<sup>55</sup> The oath reads as follows: Jaungoikuaren aurrean apalik, (Ante Dios humillado) / euzko-lur ganian zutunik (en pie sobre la tierra vasca) / asabearen gomutaz (en recuerdo de los antepasados) / Gernika'ko zuaizpian (bajo el Árbol de Guernica) / nere aginduba ondo betetzia zin dagit. (juro desempeñar fielmente mi cargo.)

<sup>56</sup> Carey Wolfe addresses the problem of speciesism, or the “ethical acceptability” of putting animals to death simply due to their species (*Animal Rites* 7). This characterization places speciesism alongside other social problems involving class, race and gender (“Human, all too Human” 571). In a different register, Dominic Pettman develops what he calls the cybernetic triangle, denoting the “unholy trinity of human, machine and animal” (5). Pettman’s book looks into “the ways in which we, as conceived species, are constantly recommunicating—and thus receiving—a relationship between ourselves, our others and out environment” (33).

<sup>57</sup> Resina considers this re-appearance of localisms and regionalisms to be a dialectical consequence of globalization. As nation-states compete on a global market place, he argues that, “Global change brings obsolescence to the master narratives of the nation-state in favor of more limber and mobile narrative lines that shift back and forth from the local, the regional and the vernacular to the macroregional, the continental and the global” (“Post-national” 383). In this sense, it is not the “national” that has emerged with globalization, but rather a fragmentary, post-national flow of local identities.

<sup>58</sup> One should also note that eucalyptus trees were also planted by the Franco regime to battle deforestation. We must skeptically note that this is more likely due to their fast growth and easy harvesting in contrast to any attempt to re-populate Spain’s vanishing forests throughout the last several centuries.

<sup>59</sup> The term *maketo* may have origins in the pre-roman term *magüeto*, meaning *novillo*.

<sup>60</sup> Arana established the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), still the largest party in the Basque Autonomous Community. In Basque, PNV’s name itself calls for the restitution

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of the old foral system, *Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea* (literally Basque Party of Supporters of God and Fuero).

<sup>61</sup> Derrida presents his strategy of deconstructing the logocentric universe of western philosophy, arguing that Saussure's linguistics privileges speech over writing. If signifiers depend on their relative differences from other signifiers, then it is impossible to understand a collection of signs in isolation. As a mode of reading, deconstruction takes this claim seriously and shows that no individual text can stand in isolation. Textuality must always be constituted by larger infinite systems. To assert meaning, then, is to remove oneself from the infinite possibilities of language and give way to a position. A deconstructive reading simply carries out this two-fold reading of texts. On the one hand, one considers the assertions made by the authorial voice while calling attention to the other connections and contradictions lurking in the linguistic threads (Lewis 1-5).

<sup>62</sup> The Basque writer Bernardo Atxaga has consistently resisted describing his literary project, beginning with *Obabakoak* (1988), as a means to merely perpetuate nationalist tendencies.

<sup>63</sup> The same tendency is also present in the travel writings of the Generation of 1898. Unamuno and Baroja, both of Basque origin, return to their home writing as tourists visiting from the center of Castile.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin famously writes: "To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (188).

<sup>65</sup> Richard Serra's piece "The Matter of Time" (2003) is a major sculpture installation that occupies the single largest room in the museum. Spectators are embedded in the piece in order to wander among a variety of steel spirals.

<sup>66</sup> Ferrán cites the poem "Ya no hay arte de arena, ni libro arenario, ni maestros," in which grammar itself falls apart. Nada ganado a los dados. ¿Cuántos / mudos? / Diecisiete. / Tu pregunta—tu respuesta. / Tu canto ¿Qué sabrá? / En la nieve. / eliev, / e—I—e" (Qtd. in Ferrán 43).

<sup>67</sup> I discuss Derrida's re-mark in chapter two (cf. 78-79).

<sup>68</sup> In her extensive study of modern and contemporary Basque art, Ana María Guasch identifies impressionism's "unfettered" observation as a constant in Basque painting since 1940. She writes: "Salvo raras excepciones, los pintores citados tienen el paisaje y la naturaleza muerta como motivos principales de sus obras, unos motivos que les condicionan o, mejor, les permiten hacer una pintura neutra, aislada de la realidad en que viven y que en todo caso sirve para proyectar sentimientos personales. Ello hace que las figuras, los individuos, no como manchas o como meros comparsas de una acción, apenas aparezcan en sus obras (84)."

<sup>69</sup> Guasch notes that the persistent styles of Basque landscape painting can be traced back to the influence of impressionism in the nineteenth century. The landscape artist's observations quickly became a kind of visual *costumbrismo*, portraying *views* authentically displaying lifestyles assumed to be Basque. More recently, rigorous ecologically oriented art has become an important valence in the Basque art world. The internationally renowned Basque sculptors Eduardo Chillida and Jorge de Oteiza also display a notable proclivity to the natural world. Oteiza's influence is of particular importance because the sculptor also wrote prolifically. His theories, as represented in *Quousque tandem...! Ensayo de interpretación estética del alma vasca* (1963), legitimate

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the anthropological search for a pre-historical Basque soul, to be found in the artistic exploration of converging natural and social spaces.

<sup>70</sup> His final work was a massive painting in Nuestra Señora de Remelluri, including a painting entitled “El Paraíso” and many portraits of saints. Some of his drawings have also been used posthumously to create a documentary about the Nigerian-Biafra War. The film was made Ramón Saldías about the Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta and the Nigerian War (“El cuento vasco”).

<sup>71</sup> Amezttoy’s “strangeness” has been explained as surrealist because of his apparently “random” association of objects, what Breton considered to be a free association of ideas springing from the unconscious. A more likely view, somewhat upheld by Aguado, is that Amezttoy’s choices of subject matter are not random at all but determined by the discursive practices of Basque nationalism (*Tiempos* 242).

<sup>72</sup> Foix sees Amezttoy’s style as related to hyperrealism due to his careful attention to color variation and detail. Thematically, Foix also states that Ruskin’s emphasis on painting “true to nature” also has resonance in Amezttoy (Amezttoy, *Karne* 13).

<sup>73</sup> Roger Cardinal coined the term “outside art” in 1972, translating the notion of Debuffet’s *art brut* or raw art. In English, the term loosely refers to self-taught artists or artists taught through nontraditional, nonwestern techniques. A few examples would include: folk art, the art of the insane, visionary art and indigenous art (Cardinal). Recently leaked self-portraits of former U.S. President George W. Bush have provoked several art critics to debate the applicability of the term to his work.

<sup>74</sup> Magritte’s painting from 1928-29 famously displays a pipe with the inscription “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.”

<sup>75</sup> Hubert cites Magritte’s interest in Edgar Allan Poe as a source for his experimental landscape painting.

<sup>76</sup> These mushrooms are commonly known as fly agaric in English and *matamoscas* or *falsa oronja* in Spanish. In fact, Amezttoy recycles the form of these mushrooms throughout his work.

<sup>77</sup> The reader will recall the analysis of “Ecocidio” from chapter one in which Riechmann conveys the affect of learning for the first time that it is possible to cross the Northwest Passage due to global warming.

<sup>78</sup> I reference Xavier Antich from the Catalan television *Amb filosofia*: “la natura imita el paisatge molt més del que el paisatge imita la natura” (“Paisatge”).

<sup>79</sup> There is also a political dimension to this claim. While the major strategy affirms the discourse and ideology of centralized power, the minor strategy takes hold of the same material and “takes it too seriously,” parodying official iterations of ideology (Egginton 6).

<sup>80</sup> One might compare this to Martin Jay’s regimes of vision

<sup>81</sup> *Umwelt* becomes a central concept in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927). For Heidegger, tools constitute a surrounding world of cares and concerns.

<sup>82</sup> Though very much outdated, Uexküll’s theories have been integrated into the philosophical works of Deleuze and Guattari, Martin Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, among others.

<sup>83</sup> For Descartes, animals are machines (*bête-machine*). One should read this “dissection” of animality as an instance of the larger Cartesian concept of extension (cf. 29-30).

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<sup>84</sup> Uexküll writes: “The clearly known life processes of the tick afford us a suitable criterion in order to demonstrate the soundness of the biological point of view as opposed to the previously common physiological treatment of the subject” (45). The tick is no longer simply an object of human perception but rather “a subject that lives in its own world, of which it is the center” (Ibid).

<sup>85</sup> This question is a reference to Derrida’s essay “And Say the Animal Responded” in which he questions Lacan’s rigid distinction of the human and the animal.

<sup>86</sup> The state of exception, a major concept in Agamben’s work, suggests a political suspension of political life in favor of authoritarian rule. A few pertinent examples are concentration camps or Guanánamo Bay Detention Camp.

<sup>87</sup> By polis, I am gesturing at the distinction made at the beginning of chapter one, which introduced the political difference between the human city (*polis*) and the natural world (*natura*).

<sup>88</sup> *The Country and the City* (1973) examines the divide between the function of the city and the countryside in English poetry since the sixteenth century. Williams’s project is indicative of a larger body of criticism, including Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival* (1974) and Robert Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967). For Williams, rural space has been dismissed as simplistic, natural and relatively insignificant for the stakes of critiquing forms of modernity. According to Williams, this representation of the rural is “myth functioning as memory” (43). Rural spaces should be re-considered as relevant to the burgeoning costs of economic and social development. In contrast, the city is a faint reflection of the natural world: the location of capitalist production and expansion, labor and commodities. Williams argues that any strict dichotomy between these two spheres becomes problematic. Indeed, a juxtaposition between the feelings attached to the countryside and those derived from the city help characterize each space as well as highlight the connection between the urban and rural locations.

<sup>89</sup> Cerdà proposed an expansion of Barcelona through what he described as the *Eixample*.

<sup>90</sup> Nebrija famously wrote in 1492 that “Cuando bien conmigo pienso muy esclarecida Reina [...] una cosa hallo y saco por conclusión muy cierta: que siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio,” urging Ferdinand and Isabella to codify Castilian as a means of expanding imperial control in Spain and the Americas (“Prólogo”).

<sup>91</sup> Verdaguer’s *La Atlántida* bizarrely connects Atlantis to Columbus. In his conclusion he writes: “Derrera aqueixa Atlántida enfonzada, / la verge de son cor ell ha ovirada, / com, part d’allà d’un pont, gentil ciutat;” (244).

<sup>92</sup> As Resina points out, Joan Maragall’s *Elogi de la paraula* instantiates a poetics that tries to blend in seamlessly with the landscape, creating a magisterial “living world” (Olaziregi, *Writers In Between*). Take, for instance, these verses from “Pirenenques:” “I em vaig tobant tan bé an allà entremig / i em ba invadint com una immensa pau, / i vaig sent un troç més del prat suau / ben verd, ben verd sota d’un cel ben blau” (54-55).

<sup>93</sup> Critic Ashton Nichols has used the term “urbanature” (it rhymes with furniture) to question the separation between “nature” and “the urban.” In a blogpost on the question, he writes: “Urbanature (rhymes with “furniture”) is the idea that all human and nonhuman lives, all animate and inanimate objects on our planet (and no doubt beyond) are linked in a complex web of interconnectedness.” I am evoking the term in a related

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register, to suggest that *noucentisme* carves at an urbanized and ordered formation of nature that seems to discount the grotesque and the politically unsavvy, for instance.

<sup>94</sup> Artur Mas, the current President of the Generalitat, has positioned himself as a major voice for Catalan independence, indicating that the Catalonia should hold a referendum on the issue.

<sup>95</sup> Another Latin American antecedent is the Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos, who connects Atlantis to his notion of *raza cósmica* in the book of the same title.

<sup>96</sup> *Costumbrismo* describes literature and visual art that captures daily life in rural settings. These texts tend to romanticize the rural as an exoticized other for urban readers.

<sup>97</sup> In the introduction to *La isla que se repite*, Benítez Rojo writes of the character of the archipelago as “un conjunto discontinuo, (¿de qué?): condensaciones inestables, turbulencias, remolinos, racimos de burbujas, algas deshilachadas, galeones hundidos, ruidos de rompientes, peces voladores, graznidos de gaviotas [...] mareas y resacas, inciertos viajes de significación; en resumen, un campo de observación muy a tono con los objetivos de Caos” (iii).

<sup>98</sup> *Volverás a Región*, originally conceived as trilogy, tells the story of the mythical forest of Mantua, guarded by the mysterious El Numa. The novel recounts the impacts of the Spanish Civil War through the protagonist's return to Región and the ensuing, confused histories this trip re-creates.

<sup>99</sup> Due to Franco's prohibition of regional languages in the public sphere, Catalan literary and cultural production remained underground until the 1970s. At this point, as talks began about how to reinstitute the language as an official state-sanctioned language, Catalonia was declared “abnormal” because of the invisibility of its own language. Normalcy, for the Catalan state, meant fomenting cultural production in Catalan as well as reinstituting Catalan into the public education system.

<sup>100</sup> This is, as I have pointed out elsewhere in a reading of Martín-Santos, a tendency displayed predominantly by nineteenth-century naturalism, such as Pardo-Bazán's portrait of Galicia in *Los pazos de Ulloa*.

<sup>101</sup> Traditionally, this concept from *Being and Time* is analyzed solely as a borderline pragmatist position: we use a hammer, define it through its use-value, but never exhaust its being (ready-to-hand or handiness, *Zuhandenheit*). We only pay attention to its being when it malfunctions. Otherwise, we are away of the object being present (Present-at-hand, *Vorhandenheit*) (*Tool* 295-96).

<sup>102</sup> In the final section of the essay, “The metaphoric and metonymic poles,” Jakobson makes the structuralist move to not only diagnose the individual patient with a disorder, but illustrate cultural and artistic tendencies to emphasize linguistic contiguity or similarity, that is, metonymy or metaphor. According to Jakobson, Romanticism and symbolism emphasize metaphor through the paradigmatic substitution of words, while various strands of realism establish contiguous relationships (syntagmatic) between words, to push narrative continuities of space and time. Jakobson writes, “A competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric, is manifest in any symbolic process be it intrapersonal or social” (60).

<sup>103</sup> *Latifundismo* is a system of agrarian exploitation, concentrating the bulk of resources and land in the hands of the elite classes and consequently destabilizing the social order of a community (due to the perceived lack of resources).

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<sup>104</sup> Second nature is an ontological or epistemological re-writing of an originary first nature. In the context of this paper, the term helps trace the erasure of rural communities under the projects of Franco's hydropolitics.

<sup>105</sup> Costa famously stated: "Escuela, despensa y siete llaves para el sepulcro del Cid," suggesting that Spain should leave behind its national imaginary involving conquest and religious wars.

<sup>106</sup> Swyngedou writes: "The hydraulic politics were, for Costa (1975), a way to place Spain within a European sociospatial framework, after its loss of influence in the Americas, on the basis of a rural development vision that combined a Rousseauian ideal with a small-scaled, independent, and democratic peasant society. The promotion of the rural ideal on the basis of a petty-bourgeois ideology would become the spinal cord of the liberal state and the route to the Europeanization of the nation (Nadal Reimat 1981:139; Fernandez Clemente 1990)."

<sup>107</sup> Castro Vasquéz observes that thinking ecologically about culture encourages plurality: "Esta ecología busca preservar la variedad y la riqueza de significados inherentes a todas las lenguas así como confrontar la contaminación con que amenaza el discurso del poder y las fosilizaciones de los significados que imponen categorías fijas sin dejar lugar a la pluralidad" (6).

<sup>108</sup> Rábade Villar considers how the natural sphere as a space of resistance begins to construct what she describes as "critical ecology." This resistance develops a new alliance between the subject and the surrounding world. She concludes: "Its fortune resides in the fact that it is a faithful image of the terrain without being completely unfaithful to the rootlessness which involves the discovery of a—sometimes irretrievable—distance between subject and world" (91).

<sup>109</sup> Eight of the most notable environmental disasters in the region include four other oil spills: the *Polycommander* (1970), *Urquiola* (1976), *Andros Patria* (1978), Good Lion (1983), Cason (1987) *Mar Egeo* (1992). As the independent report made by the Barcelona-based Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM-CSIC) observes: "[E]very 7 years on average an oil spill accident occurs off the Galician coast, and we should expect the next to occur in the next decade" (García-Olivares 533). Other major problems include various European nations dumping nuclear waste into the Atlantic Ocean and several major forest fires.

<sup>110</sup> Similar to the Catalan *Renaixença*, intellectuals and politician fomented literary production that helped codify the Galician language and distinguish it from Castilian (and Portuguese for that matter).

<sup>111</sup> Between 1900 and 1930 Galicia's population fell by 60% (Hooper 35).

<sup>112</sup> Galicia's economy had remained predominantly dependent on agriculture and fishing until the 1970s and early 1980s during a period of relative economic growth (Hooper 31).

<sup>113</sup> Galicia's UNESCO Sites include the town of Santiago de Compostela, the Route to Santiago and The Monuments of Oviedo and the Kingdom of Asturias

<sup>114</sup> On the occasion of the spill, Rajoy remarked: "Afecta a una parte importante de A Coruña, pero no es una marea negra" ("El juicio").

<sup>115</sup> *Manos Limpias* has gained notoriety over the years as a far-right interest group intent on impeding peripheral nationalist movements in Galicia, the Basque Country, and Catalonia. The group was also instrumental in bringing charges against Baltasar Garzón

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in his attempts to open up investigations surrounding the Law of Historical Memory. For more on their accusation against *Nunca Más* see “Archivan la querrela de la manos limpias contra nunca más.”

<sup>116</sup> A WWF-Spain report notes that: “Authors agree that the ecological impact of the oil spill does not stop with removal of the most visible tar from the beaches, or an end to the catastrophic deaths of hundreds of thousands of sea birds. On the contrary, the impact of some of the compounds in the oil spilled from the Prestige will last several years, depending on many factors. And ecosystem recovery will take from two years to over a decade, depending on hydrodynamic factors, the amount of oil, the type of sediment, and the ecological structure of the affected area” (Garcia 6).

<sup>117</sup> In fact, *Nunca Más* had been used once before after the protests of the 1992 *Mar Egeo* oil spill.

<sup>118</sup> The term *chapapote* is a corruption of the *Náhuatl* word *tzaucpopochtli*, meaning god of the roads/pathways. While it generally refers to any kind of asphalt or oil in a Mexican context, the term gained much currency in the Iberian context during the Galician oil spill (specifically meaning oil spill).

<sup>119</sup> I am again referring to Morton’s term “the mesh.” Cf. page 31.

<sup>120</sup> Likewise, debris from coastal Japanese towns continues to appear along the western coasts of the United States.

<sup>121</sup> Fraga, a career politician, eventually fell out of favor with the PP and ended up in Galicia. As Suso de Toro has noted, he has infamously spoken out in favor of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and condemned the actions of Judge Baltasar Garzón (*Espanoles todos* 55-57).

<sup>122</sup> María Reimóndez notes that this second sentiment is especially visible in the *Cidade da Cultura* (“City of Culture”) project, a proposed (and still not entirely completed) complex of buildings dedicated to international culture. The center used a reified form of *galeguidade* while also harboring in a variety of international artists into the gallery spaces (Hooper 195-96).

<sup>123</sup> The reference is to *Cantares gallegos*, “32.”

<sup>124</sup> I am referring to etchings that Goya made during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain (1808-1814). One of these eighty etchings has the caption “No se puede mirar.”

<sup>125</sup> For some time, there has been a Madrid-based proposal to change shipping routes to further avoid another *Prestige* case, but the initiative has been stalled for some time now (Moreno).

<sup>126</sup> Rábade Villar’s reference is to W.G. Sebald. Literature can be “the memory of those to whom the greatest injustice was done.”

<sup>127</sup> There is an important parallel here between Jonathan Mayhew’s classification of Riechmann’s work as the poetry of difference and Rábade’s emphasis on “residual subjectivity.” Indeed, as many animal studies scholars point out, what category could be more marginalized than nonhumans? (Cf. Wolfe “Human, All Too Human”)

<sup>128</sup> While the interviewees hail from across Europe, including various regions in Spain, Germany and Kazakhstan, the film mentions volunteers from the U.S., Canada, Japan and Australia, to name a few.



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<sup>129</sup> The Xunta de Galicia itself noted that “se atendieron a 1.087 voluntarios por vómitos, irritación ocular y de la faringe, problemas respiratorios y dolores de cabeza relacionados con la limpieza del carburante” (“El paso de los voluntarios”).

<sup>130</sup> Many people had a similar reaction to representations in the media: “Movido por ‘la impotencia, el clima político que se vivió después del naufragio’ y al ver ‘las imágenes del desastre y la manipulación mediática’” (Moreno).

<sup>131</sup> While it is the case that Galicians emigrants certainly played a large role in the global response to the crisis, it is also true that environmentalism, as a set of global concerns, unifies large responses to crises such as the *Prestige*.

<sup>132</sup> For Kristeva, the abject is a reaction to the blurred lines between subject and object (e.g. the experience of seeing a corpse). Art becomes a way to explore this reaction: “On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject” (Powers 207). McSweeney changes these psychoanalytic metaphors into concrete, literal descriptions of landscapes.

<sup>133</sup> While my discussion here is only limited to Rivas’s essays and poetry, animals have a predominant role as main characters in several of his novels, including *En salvaje compañía* (1994) and *Los libros arden mal* (2007).

<sup>134</sup> Rob Nixon describes these rates of disappeared forests and people as slow violence, which overwhelmingly involve peripheral, minority groups precisely because they are also reside in the very *sites* of capitalist production, in this case, *A Costa da Morte*.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Bullard notes that, in spite of the “constant” media coverage of the oil spill, few noted how BP disposed of the waste from the clean-up efforts, most of which ended up near minority communities in southern Louisiana.

<sup>136</sup> For more on the term actant (cf. 7)

<sup>137</sup> This practice is commonly referred to as “flags of convenience.”

<sup>138</sup> The reader will recall that “the meanwhile” was developed in chapter one through a discussion of Riechmann’s poem “Ecocidio” (cf. 41-48).

<sup>139</sup> One is reminded here of Émile Zola’s open letter “J’accuse” published in *L’Aurore* in response to the Dreyfus Affair.

<sup>140</sup> Castells views the network as a constant of societies. It is indicative of cultures and “all kinds of life” (21).

<sup>141</sup> Upon his acceptance into the Real Academia Galega, Rivas reflects: “Cando imaxino unha forma para representar a boca da literatura o primeiro que me vén á cabeza son os círculos ou circos concéntricos. Poderíamos dicir que é a primeira escrita, o primeiro graffiti, a primeira expresión en signos, de que temos noticia no arco atlántico. É a imaxe cósmica da boca á intemperie” (22).

<sup>142</sup> I am referring to the poem “Historia del arte.” This poem begins after the flooding of the river “Pequeno.” The small river’s liquidity leaves its own topographical situation and enters into a painter’s study, “looking for landscapes / all of that awake and oneiric material” (112). The artist, and custodian of all vanguards, attempts to salvage the drenched paintings, converting his studio into a painting hospital, trying to extract water

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from the drowned, filth from the muddied and rearrange the “amputated” images of the broken.

<sup>143</sup> The poem “Mayday” almost exactly mirrors the title of Rivas’s short essay on *Nunca Más* that we examined above, “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.” It begins with the sounding of alarm through onomatopoeia. Its structure mimics the traditional form of *saudade* and even alludes to the popular form throughout the text. But “Mayday” is not simply the mourning of a lost land, but rather the sounding of alarm that *something* has failed. The poem explores the potential effects of this sounding of alarm.

<sup>144</sup> “Historia del dinero” begins “Mi sombrero, en el suelo, es el Banco de Europa” (114). The poem then proceeds to meditate on being unemployed and the sensations of having and not having money. “La mano vacía (11-M)” speaks indirectly about the loss of life during the Madrid terrorist attack of 2004. This poem focuses metonymically on “indelible” memory of an empty hand and the act of painting (117).

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